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HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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COMMENT

IN most countries it may be said that the successful live in the twentieth century, the failures in the nineteenth. In England it is particularly true because so many of our institutions for the failing—prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, law courts, workhouses and private hotels and boarding houses—are nineteenth-century buildings with furniture, customs and custodians to match. In this number we are given a glimpse of sex-life in English prisons which, in a society which produces more and more homosexuals and yet retains all the old-fashioned legislation for punishing them, are naturally fuller than ever. In the most intelligent and readable of modern accounts of psycho-analysis, *The Mind in Action* (John Lehmann, 15s.), Dr. Eric Berne writes: 'Experiments with marihuana show that a usually normal man may even make love to a bridge lamp if his libido becomes aroused sufficiently and there is no reasonable outlet available. It is not surprising, then, that where there are no women, men will sometimes turn to each other for sexual satisfaction. . . .' It has also been noticed that when men hypnotized on the stage are handed a mop and told 'That is your favourite film star' they begin to fondle the handle with lubricous embarrassment. Should these unfortunate people go to prison too? It is a nice question. Another institution which we are apt to forget in the heat and sport of this first true post-war summer is the army, into which young men are now conscripted at the age of eighteen. One wonders how many of the readers of HORIZON are males who can remember what it felt like to be eighteen and how they regarded the customary week-a-year which they had to spend, if in a school O.T.C., under canvas. Imagine, at the most sensitive moment of intellectual growth, multiplying this week by fifty-two and we get a vague idea of the year's sentence of hard labour and monotony which we have imposed on the young and which must inevitably retard their development. This problem is also treated in this number and, with the story by the young American writer, Donald Wyndham, and Durrell's analysis of Henry Miller, the theme of oppression and revolt is complete. As the threat of war recedes, and for the moment it has receded, the basic questions of human rights make themselves heard. What do we think human life is about? and

how do we propose to put our thinking into action? It is not a bad idea to imagine a man from Mars, a woman from Venus, or an angel, if you like, arriving with an earnest curiosity about this planet and then to see how some of our most cherished institutions such as customs barriers, frontiers, currency restrictions, the Berlin Corridor, licensing laws, censorship, prisons, armies, working in offices, divorce, probate and admiralty—our whole experiment in gracious dying—sound when patiently explained in such circumstances. Mr. Salkeld reveals the existence of a state of mind to be found both among old warders and old convicts known as ‘prison rot’. One would like to know more about its symptoms. Or do we know too much?

PABLO SALKELD

THE UGLY HEAD

FIFTY years have passed since Oscar Wilde was sent to prison, but in the intervening half-century the great mass of the uninformed public still views with scorn and derision those often unfortunate people who are caught out in the committal of sexual offences.

This biased attitude goes further than the masses; it is a known fact that certain judges are particularly prejudiced against, for example, homosexuals. For this reason defending lawyers will do all in their power to switch such cases to courts presided over by less biased judges.

Among thinking men and women the whole attitude towards the sexually abnormal has changed. The official outlook, too, is now more tolerant, and it is a healthy sign that a joint Committee of the British Medical Association and the Magistrates Association recently agreed that drastic changes should be made in the laws relating to the treatment of sexual offenders. Furthermore, the Committee suggested that British law regarding homosexuals should be brought into line with Continental law, so far as consenting adults are concerned.

To generalize, when trying to describe prisons, is impossible. The English prison today runs from the dirt and squalor of the London and provincial slum gaols, to the light and healthful surroundings of the modern 'open camp' prison and the regional 'Training Centre'. Unfortunately, the great majority of prisoners are obliged to serve their sentences in the former, or in the equally sordid local or county gaols.

In trying to give a clear and unbiased picture of actual conditions during the past few years, it is fairest to mention only those places which one has seen and to quote only that which one has learned from unimpeachable sources, such as prison Governors, Assistant Governors, Medical Officers, and the more serious and reliable prison officers.

The prisoner has no access to the files of his fellows, which is right and proper. What he knows about another prisoner is learned from prison talk, newspaper reports—the banned Sunday papers are always obtainable at a price—and from accounts by

warders attending trials. Furthermore, the man concerned is often all too willing to tell his story, but even this, as other sources of information, must be carefully sifted before it can be accepted as fact.

Sex, in its lowest and beastliest form, is all too apparent the moment one sets foot within prison walls, and in the grim, fortress-like old prisons it finds a fetid outlet in excessive masturbation, the writing of filth on lavatory walls—an international habit—in pencil, chalk or excreta. Thus, in these desolate monuments to Howard, the reformer with his Bible and his demented son, the sexual instinct immediately becomes something foul and stinking. The natural liar and cheat, the warped and filthy of mind, tend to rise to the top, while the man with any spark of decency shrinks within himself and lives on the fringe of a constant murmur of the unwholesome and obscene. The undertone of all conversation centres on masturbation, pin-up girls and decrepit whores. Occasionally two men make an opportunity to be alone long enough to indulge in mutual masturbation or in sodomy. The incident, within a few hours, is gloated over by most of the prison and the details, more lurid with each telling, are passed from mouth to mouth.

Because of the attitude, both public and official, towards the sexual offender, it follows that men convicted of any offence under this heading are more likely to be found in the long-term convict prisons than in the short-term local or county gaols.

As a man's prison, the 'Island'—which name will serve as well as any other—no longer exists, and the inmates have gone to other establishments. As a 'Star' convict prison it accommodated only first offenders, and the first six months of any sentence had to be served in one of the workshops before application could be made to work on one of the outside parties.

The tailor's shop, known variously as 'Pouff Park' or 'Homo Hall', held nearly all the homosexuals and pederasts, as well as many other sex cases. The few remaining men were an assortment of so-called murderers, confidence men and traitors. One youth, detained during His Majesty's pleasure, had calmly machine-gunned his mother and father following some domestic upheaval. Within a week of his arrival he was one of the best customers of the shop prostitute, a surly youth known as Wiggs.

Wiggs, in his early twenties, gave the impression of being

much younger. He was uncouth and of very low intellect, and although a great deal of his surliness was due to an incongruous shyness he could by no means be described as a likable youth. In common with most prisoners, he was a heavy smoker; having no other asset than his body, he promptly placed that at the disposal of all and sundry, at the price of a quarter of an ounce of tobacco a time. When not thus engaged he spent his time talking filth or masturbating, and was a classic example of that prison condition, brought on by excessive self-abuse, known as 'Whanker's Doom'.

To one who had had little or nothing to do with any sort of homosexual the first contact, perhaps unfavourably distorted by the surroundings, was very unsavoury. Until one got to know them, personal prejudices inevitably tended to influence one's attitude, but it is impossible to work side by side with people for months on end without getting to know something about them.

In prison one soon learns to accept people for what they are and to ignore, so far as possible, what they have done. It is fatal for a prisoner to forget on which side of the fence he belongs.

The homosexuals formed a happy and amusing company. Most of them had served several years, and yet not one showed any trace of that disease known as 'Prison Rot'. Nowhere could one find more honest and reliable company, always ready to help one in any way possible without thought of reward. That alone means a great deal in a community where the slightest favour done is accompanied by a request for a cigarette.

'Molly' was, unashamedly, a male prostitute. She walked and talked with all the gestures and inflexions of the female. Her naturally long lashes were darkened with dye from the bootshop, and ochre from the painter's party tinted her cheeks. She was incapable of any movement which did not betray the female in the male body. Sauntering up to the instructor's bench with a newly finished coat—'Molly' was an expert at her job and was trusted with all the most important work—she never failed to drape the garment round her shoulders and, hand on hip, chin on shoulder, simper to the nearest prisoner:

'My dear, *how* do you like my new furs? Rather sweet, don't you think?'

When arrested, 'Molly' was wearing French knickers and a flowered evening gown. As this was legally hers, it was put with

her other possessions in the prison store. At one prison concert 'Molly' wore these garments to do an act which all but the stoutest of her friends unanimously agreed turned the stomach. It was one of the rare occasions when an act was shouted down, and the effect on the very staid old Governor had disastrous results for 'Molly's' future. It was distressing to see her weeping bitterly in a bus with a dozen undesirables, destined for one of the hard, old-time convict prisons. 'Molly', whatever her faults, had likable qualities and was rather like the friendly old whore with a heart of gold whom one finds it impossible to pass by without exchanging a nod or a smile.

To the most ignorant and unobservant, contact with 'Molly' and her friends soon made plain the fact that these helpless people were not responsible for their abnormality. They molested none and made no attempt to interfere with the young prisoners. They bore their punishment better than many so-called 'tough guys', and asked nothing more than to be left alone. Even were such people allowed to seduce each other to death—and it is a death many of them would no doubt welcome—they would still cause no real harm to the community.

The long-awaited Penal Reform Bill, one of the main topics of any prison, was one day under discussion. One barrack lawyer started the rumour that all sex cases were to be sent to a separate establishment, and many firmly believed this to be fact. Contrary to expectations, many homosexuals, as well as others in a similar class, were antagonistic to the suggestion. This was due, though, not to a fear of losing possible converts, but for the same reason which makes a certain type of cyclist oppose the construction of separate cycling paths on dangerous highways.

What is probably the worst feature of prison life, so far as the sexual offender is concerned, is the danger of the corruption of young prisoners. In nine cases out of ten it is not that the young prisoner is sexually abnormal when he associates with older and perverted men. Primarily he prostitutes himself for tobacco or money and, as a secondary cause, his natural sexual desires lead him to experiment in the only field open to him.

By way of contrast to 'Molly' and her friends, there is the dangerous type of homosexual. 'Polly', sentenced to ten years' penal servitude, was one of these. Charming and polished, there was nothing outwardly to connect him with the most degrading

perversions imaginable. No one, however, was safe from his attentions, and there is no doubt at all that he corrupted more than one young man in the prison. He was also responsible for the downfall of 'X', who was serving a five-year sentence.

'X' was a likable and inoffensive man in his early thirties. He belonged to that class best described as the 'Mother's Boy' type of homosexual. It is highly probable, though pure conjecture, that when 'X' met 'Polly' he was about as innocent as any man can be, and that his association with women had been limited to a doting and selfish mother. When seduced by 'Polly' who, it is safe to assume, lost no time on such a simple victim, 'X' very probably thought that he was being initiated into the mysteries of life and that that in which he was so willingly participating was as natural as the actions of the birds and the bees.

It is through association with men like 'Polly' that young prisoners are liable to corruption. Commissioner's reports refer to the segregation of prisoners; emphasize that the first offender no longer mixes with the old lag; that the young prisoner is kept apart from all others. Technically this is true but, although they eat and sleep in separate quarters, it is inevitable that young prisoners must mix with the rest at all other times; in the workshops, on the exercise yard, at chapel, on the playing fields and at concerts.

The attitude of the normal prisoner towards the homosexual is at first appearance clearly defined. Closer scrutiny complicates the general outlook. Two young regular soldiers, notorious for their abnormal association, both spoke with the utmost contempt for the effeminate homosexuals. On the other hand, they were on the closest terms with an Irish youth who spent all his spare time pursuing every possible man or youth likely to co-operate. When asked why they held such divergent views the answer was spontaneous:

'Oh, he's all right. He only *gives* it.'

This extraordinary attitude prevailed among many other prisoners, and is rather akin to the outlook of the idle youth who, while taking every opportunity to seduce willing females, at the same time sneers at his victims.

The officer in charge of the tailor's shop was an understanding and shrewd man. A good prison officer prefers to know nothing of the private lives of the men in his charge. Thus he does not

allow himself to be influenced by personal prejudices. In this particular case it was virtually impossible not to know something about each man and at times the officer expressed his true feelings. On one such occasion, waving his hands towards the back benches, he burst out:

‘Look at ’em ! Those dirty old bastards make me sick. Give me a good, honest burglar any time. Bah !’

On other occasions he lamented the past:

‘Look at the people we’re getting nowadays ! The *tone* of the place has gone down. Why, I remember when we was full of public school boys, with an Etonian on every bench. Look at ’em *now* !’

Within a few minutes his natural good nature always returned, and he was soon giving help and advice to some bewildered prisoner.

The average prisoner holds in supreme contempt those sentenced for offences against children, and the proportion of such cases serving their time on the ‘Island’ was high. Although there are hundreds of men in prison who ought never to have been sentenced, there are also those who would best be disposed of by the gas chamber. That, at least, is what one is inclined to feel on coming into contact with certain types. It is in such moments that logical reasoning goes by the board and one is apt to overlook the all-important fact that, to commit certain offences, the human mind must indeed be in a very diseased state. Even if one’s reasoning will allow that, there still appears to be no good purpose served by keeping alive those degraded specimens who scarcely bear description.

There can be few with sympathy to spare for such men as ‘Nicker’ Norris who, in his frenzy to seduce a very small boy, enlarged the child’s anus with a razor blade.

‘Nicker’—the name derives from the verb ‘to nick’ or cut—was an illiterate of the tramp class.

At least three-quarters of a century ago *Punch* caricatured the snobbery between different classes of prisoners. Much the same thing exists today. The killer is admired by the youthful would-be gangster. The professional burglar turns up his nose at the puny efforts of untrained thieves. The black-marketeer is frowned on. The loud-mouthed street trader, who threw pepper in the eyes of a bank messenger and nearly blinded him for life, sneers at the

university man whose passion for telegraph boys led him to send himself some hundred and fifty telegrams. The prison organist, against whom a host of choir boys gave evidence, will turn his back on the man who shot an unfaithful wife.

Although nearly all sex cases were regarded with contempt by the other prisoners, the scornful attitude towards fallen priest or parson was particularly marked. This was due more to a hatred of the Church, than to the fact that children had been offended against.

The atmosphere of antagonistic unrest can often be felt during the compulsory prison service and the utmost derision is shown quite openly for those fawning sycophants who, in every prison, try to curry favour with the chaplain by assisting in Church matters. In nearly every prison a large percentage of these are sexual offenders and, of eight men in the prison choir on the 'Island', seven and the organist were known to be sex cases, mostly guilty of offences against children.

Statistics show that there is a larger proportion of Roman Catholics in prison than of any other denomination. Unless a man registers as being an atheist or an agnostic—and few who do this understand the meaning of either word—the morning services are compulsory. On the 'Island' the evening service was voluntary and attendance, particularly on dark evenings, appeared to be surprisingly large. The explanation was that between two guard posts the way to the chapel led through a shrub-lined path. The shrubs, on such evenings, positively shook with cavorting couples. Otherwise the workshop lavatories were the chief meeting places for prison prostitutes and lovers. Although the W.C.s were located in glass-fronted recesses so that the duty officers could, in theory, keep an eye on the occupants, it was nearly always possible for two men to hide for a few moments behind the half-doors. This was made easier by the fact that in nearly every prison men are, very unofficially, permitted a few minutes in which to snatch an illicit smoke in the lavatory. The warders know from experience that by making this little concession they will get better work and co-operation from their men.

It is a serious offence against prison discipline for two men to be found in the same cell. Should, however, two men be caught red-handed committing sodomy in a cell, it is highly improbable that they would come before the Governor on this charge. The

records would show that punishment was awarded because two men were in one cell at the same time.

Frequently, prison warders are well aware of all that goes on within the prison, but are unable to gather enough genuine evidence to make out any individual case. Quite a number of warders dislike preferring charges against prisoners, unless forced by circumstances to do so. Furthermore, many breaches of prison rules are overlooked, and when unhealthy association between two prisoners is noticed, it is sometimes merely an occasion for lewd banter. The youth Wiggs, for example, was frequently teased by certain warders who lost little opportunity to refer to the amount of tobacco in his possession, and his methods of acquiring it. Although sexually abnormal warders do exist, they are comparatively few. What is commonly referred to as 'bottom patting' is not unknown, though it is more generally practised by elderly warders whose many years of service has led to that general mental deterioration known as 'Prison Rot'.

In all matters the prison authorities, aided by the powers of the Official Secrets Act, follow a very simple formula, popular in most branches of the Civil Service. That is—Deny Everything. This saves a great deal of tiresome investigation, and if ever anything goes wrong or a situation becomes embarrassing, plan No. 2 automatically comes into force—Pass the Buck.

So far as the Old Guard—the old-time, out-dated prison official—is concerned, sex is recognized by the segregation of men and women prisoners. In men's prisons, at least, a weekly dose of bromide in the evening cocoa solves any sex problems likely to arise.

The habit of writing love notes is common in all prisons, including those reserved for women. Scraps of lavatory paper, with passionately pencilled declarations of undying love, are thrust under cell doors or passed from one to the other in workshop or hall.

In some prisons parties of men are sent to girls' Borstal Institutions, and, although they have little opportunity to come into actual contact with each other a pen friendship starts almost at once. It is a punishable offence to smuggle anything out of or into a prison, yet many men will risk a bread-and-water diet and precious days of lost remission, by passing love notes or by carrying them into prison for a friend.

Probably the only prisoners who are ever in a position to satisfy sexual desires in a normal way are those privileged to work on farm parties or in the modern 'open camp' prisons. In either case men are kept within certain prescribed bounds by a system of trust only. Any breach of this trust means instantaneous return to a maximum security prison, and those who are thus returned have usually been caught trying to reach the nearest pub or associating with women landworkers or holiday-makers.

Isolated stories, in need of corroboration, refer to successful affairs carried out between male and female inmates of those prisons and mental institutions situated within the same outer walls. The difficulties attendant in such circumstances, in the way of high walls, locked doors and jealous vigilance of men and women warders call for the utmost ingenuity, and it seems highly probable that the lunatic, with his notorious cunning, would stand the better chance of success.

On the 'Island' nearly all men serving sentences for incest hailed from Wales, or the borders of Monmouthshire, thus upholding a national reputation. Whereas educated and intelligent men were serving sentences for a variety of sexual offences, all those guilty of incest were of low intelligence.

Endless accounts of individual cases would serve no useful purpose. Many of them are the tragic results of unfortunate early circumstances, but association with such infinite variety leads to a firm conviction that until a complete revision of our existing laws and methods of punishment is brought about, it will be impossible to reach any level of true justice.

The Howard League has for long advocated a system whereby, guilt having been proved, sentence should be passed, not by the judge, but by a specialist board. It is not a new idea, but it is one which does promise a more equitable distribution of punishment, if punishment is the primary object of a sentence!

Prison is an easy answer to a difficult problem, but when those with the power of awarding it are better informed, it will not be handed out indiscriminately. It will be used only as a last resort.

The aim of reformers today is to try to make the offender a better man. A reformed man who can take his place in society is an asset to that society, and the old wasteful prison system whereby men's hearts were hardened against their fellows has no place in a modern world.

Between the sexual offender and the man guilty of a deliberate act of dishonesty there is a world of difference. However evil, however atrocious and revolting the crime in either class, the culprit is entitled to a fair hearing and, so far as present standards go, gets it. If it is necessary to incarcerate a man for any period it is only humane to see that, so long as he is willing to respond to good treatment, he shall be given all help possible. The petty thief with a dozen convictions may need a lot of help before he is converted into a useful citizen. On the other hand, many sexual offenders are exemplary citizens but for their unfortunate abnormalities. *If* prison is good for the petty thief then he should be sent there, but no prison, however it is run, can do more than inflict unnecessary suffering on an unfortunate whose instincts do not belong to the body which fate has given him.

Today, in the all-too-few modern prisons, the mental health of the prisoner is helped by the introduction of an extensive educational programme. His physical health, aided by enforced regularity of habits, may benefit by working in the fields and woods. Under such conditions the mind tends to become healthier and sexual problems diminish in importance. Even in the older prisons there is some sort of an educational drive but, beyond limited gymnastics and P.T. or a game of football on the asphalt parade ground, there is little to promote physical improvement.

Many reformers advocate the complete satisfaction of all natural desires, both physical and mental, and urge the serious consideration of some means whereby this could be achieved. Whether the celibate life is good or bad for the average man is a moot point. For those reformers who consider forced celibacy bad for both moral and physical health, a difficult problem arises. How best to solve the problem is a question which seems to have no entirely satisfactory answer.

Mexico, and certain other countries, allow a prisoner to be visited by his wife. It is hard to visualize such a system in the British prison, and no man worth his salt would consider allowing his wife to visit him for such an obvious purpose.

In some of the United States there is a system of parole, whereby a good-conduct man may earn, say, a fortnight's holiday. According to an ardent Communist, once resident on the 'Island', Russia's answer to this problem is to turn the prisoner loose for twenty-four hours.

A frivolous suggestion is frequently made that all middle-aged spinsters, whose only company is that of cats and Pekinese dogs, should be allowed free access to men's prisons. Perhaps celibacy is preferable!

That parole can be given to most types of British prisoners has been proved by the introduction of farm parties, and the 'open camp' prisons where men are allowed an almost astonishing amount of freedom. Fear of losing this freedom and of being returned to the grim walls of one of our older prisons, helps men to stand by their promises. It naturally follows that if selected men were offered parole on certain conditions they would not break faith. Thus any natural desires could be satisfied under healthy conditions.

This, as an answer, appears simple, but it presents many problems for the prison Governor who must decide who is, and who is not, suitable for parole. Great discontent must inevitably arise among those considered unsuitable, and there is the ever-present danger of a man committing some crime during his period of freedom, or that men might contract venereal disease.

Only when penal reform has advanced to a point where the award of punishment, or remedial treatment—whichever is considered most desirable—is the result of intelligent diagnosis, will the problem appear to be solved. Under ideal conditions prison will be the last resort; something very unpleasant to be awarded to the worst possible characters when all else fails.

DONALD WINDHAM

ROSEBUD

'LOVE,' the negro said, and his voice made it clear that it was something concrete, something that could be touched with the hand and looked at with the eye and smelled with the nose: 'Love is the best stuff in the world'.

He had been named Rosebud by his mother when he was a baby and it probably had been a fitting name for a pickaninny, but now he was a man of twenty-eight, dressed in colourless dirty pants, a dark brown leather jacket that emphasized the narrowness of his hips (though his buttocks stuck out sharply making his body twice

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as thick there as anywhere else) and the rounded wideness of his shoulders. On his head he wore a leather cap that fitted tightly concealing any sign of his ears and buttoning under his chin (though the straps were loose now and hanging down on either side of his neck) and a pair of motor-cyclist's goggles pushed up on his cap above his forehead. The skin from his sideburns across his chin was large-pored so that he never shaved close and the short black hairs always emphasized the roughness of his brown face with black dots, his mouth was heavy and stale with whisky breath, and the brownish whites of his eyes were bloodshot and red. There was a wicked humour but a reverent earnestness in his voice.

'There ain't nothing so sweet as love. Love is so sweet you can eat it with a spoon. Once you've had it you don't want nothing else in this world. Man, you don't want money, clothes, food, liquor, nothing.'

He turned away making a depreciating gesture with his hand as he finished speaking and walked away from the gas-heated radiator toward the back of the drug-store where the druggist was waiting, tight-faced, with a package for him to deliver. Outside was a dry wintry cold, but the inside of the drug-store, despite the bareness of the tile floor and plate-glass windows in which twisted crepe paper and candy boxes formed a display, was warm and bright. The rack of magazines was long and high, full of all kinds of periodicals which the curb boy read as he leaned against the radiator. The soda jerker, a sallow black-eyed man, waited behind the counter of the soda fountain, where he had made only one hot chocolate all afternoon, for the druggist to go home and leave him with the night pharmacist so they could talk frankly about the things which interested them. And after the cease of the negro's low voice and the loud clap of his boot taps on the tile floor as he walked to the front of the store and went out, and the muffled roar of the motor-cycle starting, there was silence until the druggist, who had taken off his white jacket and was ready to put on his suitcoat and go home, cursed:

'Goddamn that nigger. He lets more goddamned cold air in this place every time he goes out. He's only going over to North Fulton Road and I want you to check on what time he gets back here, goddamn him. I want you to tell me tomorrow how long he was out. I'm goddamned tired of him staying out an hour on these short trips.'

The night pharmacist said:

'Yes, sir.'

And there was another silence while the druggist put on his overcoat and scarf, shaking his shoulders until his body settled comfortably in the tweed coat, took his gloves in his hand and walked toward the front door.

'Good-night,' he said sourly when he had opened the door.

The soda jerker replied:

'Good-night.'

But the druggist was already outside and the door swung closed behind him without his making any sign that he heard.

No negroes lived on the north side of town where the drug-store was. Every morning and again every night after supper at about seven or eight o'clock the street-cars were loaded with negro women, old and young, fat and thin, going to and from work. Off the main road the section was strictly residential with brick bungalows and more pretentious houses behind wide lawns. The roads were paved with black tar, but there were no sidewalks and every mile or so long stretches of trees bare of any houses would line the roads on either side. As Rosebud roared up and down the long sloping hills on the Harley Davidson more powerful than any of the rich people he served, his waist growing up from the seat of the motor-cycle as firm as the trunk of a tree from the ground, his brown eyes saw everything he passed even in the darkest stretches of the road. When he roared away from the drug-store through the clear and sparkling cold, the heat of his body within his clothes contrasting to the frozen air rushing past his face, he sped unencumbered until he saw the coloured girl he was looking for and swerved toward her at the side of the road, his foot on the brakes, the motor ripping and popping. He stopped an inch from her.

'Doggone you, Rosebud, you near scared the life out of me coming at me that way. What's going on in your mind?' she demanded.

He looked up and down her face smiling at her fear and anger.

'Nothing. What's going on in yours?'

'Nothing! You get on about your business. I got to catch my car.'

'Get on and I'll give you a ride up the hill.'

The girl stared at him without flirting, looking from his face to the wide seat behind him which he had moved from to vacate for her.

'You going in the opposite direction.'

'It won't take me no time to turn around and run you up the hill.'

The girl looked from the seat to his face with the mistrust of a child who wishes to accept a favour from an adult but is suspicious of the concession which will be involved.

'I got to get on home, my man's waiting for me.'

'Well, climb on and I'll take you up the hill.'

She closed the top of the paper bag she was carrying and shifted it to the elbow of one arm. Then she threw one leg over the body of the motor-cycle, holding her dress to her knees, and sat on the wide back of the seat.

'Ready?' he asked.

'You be careful with this thing,' she answered. 'I wants to get home in one piece.'

In a leaning arc he turned the motor-cycle around on the road and roared back up the hill aware of the firm grip of the girl's hands on his firm hips and the pressure of the insides of her thighs upon the outsides of his.

'What you doing tomorrow night?' he asked.

'I ain't studying tomorrow night,' she answered. 'I got to get on home, my man's waiting for me.'

But the next night on his way back from delivering a package on Piedmont Road he parked at the edge of the woods in the same place, the kickstand up, the toe of one of his boots touching the hard pavement beneath him, and waited for her to come over the crest of the hill. It was not as cold as the night before but a moisture had entered the air, a dampness which penetrated, and when he saw the girl she was wearing an old fur-trimmed cloth coat. As she came down the hill toward him unaware of his presence he could see her rounded body swinging indifferently beneath the worn cloth as clearly as he had seen it beneath the wash dress she had been wearing the first time he had seen her one Saturday afternoon in early fall when he had stopped at the side of the road

to talk with two other girls he knew. They had introduced him to her but she had not particularly interested him then. For a while she had been only an insignificant star among the many constellations through which he roared like a comet on the motor-cycle at night. But he stopped for every star, for every gleam on the side of the road, and he did this for her also. She talked to him always without flirting, always insistent on continuing her way, always seeming somehow well fed among the hungry, and gradually her indifference and satiety had challenged him. At first he had not gone out of his way to encounter her. He had not arranged his deliveries so he would meet her. But when he did meet her it had been a punctuation in continual waiting. The idea of making love to her did not prevent him from making love to others, but it never ceased to exist for him. No matter what he had been doing when he saw her he was aware that the swinging indifferent flesh which curved beneath her clothing had been indifferent to him all the time he had been away from it; and gradually his awareness had hardened into a continuous need to make her indifference feel him and know that it wanted to feel him, a need which remained even when he did not think of it, just as the sky remains above men though it is not continuously in their thoughts.

It was not that he was starved for love. His problem was having enough time and energy to take all the opportunities for love which he found. There was nothing else to stop him. There was no reason he should not satisfy every desire and every opportunity as far as love went, for in the same way that he had settled into working fifteen hours a day at the drug-store and into the resignation that there was nothing else in life for him except love, so he had settled into the realization that desire such as his was freedom enough and that once he got going among his kind there was no end to the fulfilment he could find in love. Twenty-four hours a day he could have love without anything but his capacity stopping him. So in defiance to need and even pleasure (pleasure is just the first drop in the bucket—not that the first drop isn't good when the bucket is empty) he had gone on giving love to more and more girls even after he had found one who might have contained him for he remembered how he had felt that the first girl to whom he had given love would be enough and how she had not been. He had been true to no one, but no one, except he himself, had been true to him. He possessed himself in love. Or love possessed him.

But no girl did, for as soon as he thought of giving love to just one of them that took away too much of his freedom, and a man cannot stand for the amount of freedom which he has settled on to be taken away from him. Then he wanted to love them all, and by the time that he discovered that to love them all was impossible, he no longer even thought of it. He had become involved in so many satisfactions that desire could never go far enough for him to think about it abstractly again, or for him to think about anything except the appointments he had from day to day. Then this girl had come along, the absolute opposite of all the desiring and affectionate loving girls he had known, and he could not get her out of his mind.

There was no urgency in his seeing her tonight for he had a date later with a girl who was working late for a party at her folks' house. But he could not get it out of his mind that with just a little more effort, with just the right word at the right time, he could bring forth the spark of response from her that would make him feel at ease again. And he waited at the foot of the hill in the dark until she was almost at him, then he took her by surprise.

'Good evening,' he said.

She stopped and looked at him.

'Evening, Rosebud. What you waiting here in the dark for?'

This was a question, more encouragement than she had given him ever before, and he took his time running his tongue comfortably over the inside of his teeth before he replied.

'To see you.'

'What you want to see me for?'

'I been thinking you and me ought to get together.'

'I got to get home to my man,' she said. 'He's home waiting for me to get there.'

'Every night?'

'Every night but Saturday. He works Saturday nights.'

'You want to take just a little ride?' he asked.

'I got to go catch my car,' she answered, looking directly in his eyes.

'Well, get on and I'll give you a ride up the hill.'

She hesitated as she had done the night before, but he knew that she was going to get on and he waited. He drove her to the top of the hill across the street from the carline and let her off the motor-cycle.

'What time you get off Saturday?' he asked.

'You know I gets off the same time every night,' she answered. 'Good-night.'

'Good-night,' Rosebud said and a moment later he thrust down the starter and roared away.

Saturday was cold and damp. Rosebud wore not only his winter underwear and his shirt and dirty tie beneath his leather jacket, but also two sweaters. All afternoon he made his deliveries as swiftly as possible and returned to sit on the gas radiator just inside the door beside the curb boy until there was another. The afternoon turned dark early, the light fading suddenly as it does in winter-time, so that the time after dark and before the girl would get off from work passed as though it had always been dark. Yet he was not aware of waiting. At six he had a package to deliver on Lake View Drive. On his way back he cruised up and down the deserted blocks between the house where she worked and the carline. Then he parked at the side of the road, kicked down the stand, and waited. It was so late that if he returned to the store now he might miss her. He waited ten minutes before he saw her hurrying along in the dark at the edge of the black road. He kicked up the stand, stamped on the starter, gave an impatient feed to the gas and coasted up the hill to meet her. His boot sole scraped along the tar as he came to a stop at her side.

'You look cold,' he said.

She was walking stooped over and her face was expressionless beneath the raw air.

'I is cold,' she answered in the lowest tone he had ever heard from her.

She sat on the back of the seat. Almost noiselessly the motorcycle started and swung over the top of the hill. They coasted down to the bottom, then he stepped on the gas and she did not protest as they sped away in the opposite direction of the carline. The air rushing past them on three sides of each was as cold and fresh as a clean cotton sheet on a bed in an unheated house on a freezing night, but the pocket of air between his back and her front was warm. Then that became cold also as they coasted off the road, the motor-cycle bumping over the frozen pine-needed earth and slowly coming to a standstill among the trees out of sight of the road.

'What did we come here for?' she asked.

'This is a good place,' he said.

He swung one foot in a high arc through the air and stood at the side of the motor-cycle. The girl remained on the seat as though she was not going to move until he took her elbow and helped her off. Still holding her arm he led her silently through the trees. Then he stopped and opened her coat. Her hand touched his in a half-hearted but not flirting attempt to stop him and her skin was dry and rough. But a moment later his hand touched her flesh where it was not exposed and it was not only smooth but was covered with a warm damp film of enclosed sweat.

'This sure is beautiful,' he said.

'It's too cold here,' she said.

'Come lie down under the tree.'

'It's too cold.'

'Not under the tree.'

It was not a pine tree but a fir with branches sweeping out low to the ground. When he was above her he kissed her on the mouth, but she turned her face away and said that she did not like to be kissed, so he stopped. He did not really like it either. Then, though at first he thought that it was sweat breaking out on his calves, it began to rain. He felt the burning wet dots for several minutes without thinking of them before she said:

'It's raining, Rosebud.'

He looked over his shoulder at her legs, uncovered by the coat which was beneath her, and settling back on his knees he took off his leather jacket and laid it over her bare legs from the knees down. Then he stretched out full length above her again, and she put her hand on the back of his neck where the sharp needles of the tree were scratching him and pulled his thick mouth down hard against hers.

The rain had stopped falling in drops when he stood up, but it had collected in the needles of the tree which brushed against his chest and soaked his sweater. He helped her up so she would not get wet and gave her his handkerchief and after he had put on his leather jacket he helped her brush off a streak of the dry red clay which had rubbed into her coat. He was calm, with a warm taste like blood in his mouth, like the taste in his mouth when he had been in a fight and his lip was cut. But she was trembling; her jaw was wavering up and down and her teeth were chattering.

'Get all the dirt off my coat so it won't show,' she stuttered. 'Get it all off.'

'It's off,' he said. 'Come on, you're cold.'

He led her along through the trees back to the motor-cycle, but she was still trembling as though she were afraid rather than merely cold.

'Is you afraid, honey, or just cold?' he asked.

'I'll walk back,' she said.

She turned to go, but he stopped her and put his arms around her body with her arms inside his and hanging down at her sides. Again he felt the indifference of her fullness which he had first seen through the wash dress that Saturday afternoon as calm now as though nothing had changed.

'What you talking about?' he said. 'You get on and I'll ride you up to the carstop.'

'Somebody might see us,' she said.

'What's the difference? I've rid you up before. Get on, won't nobody know I didn't just give you a ride up the hill.'

He helped her on to the back of the seat, then sat down in front of her and stamped on the starter until the motor caught. She rode behind him without speaking, with only the pressure of her hands on his hips, but when he stopped the motor-cycle across from the carline and let her off her teeth were still chattering and she spoke standing beside him looking straight before her.

'If you ever see me walking with somebody else don't you speak to me, do you hear? Don't speak to me if there's anybody walking nearby that can see us, do you hear?'

Her voice was full of supplication and he answered soothingly.

'Don't you worry, I'll only speak to you like I always done. There ain't nothing for you to worry about. You just cold.'

He called good-night to her as she walked away from him across the street, but she did not reply. For a minute longer he watched the back of her cloth coat, then an involuntary shudder shook his body from the shoulders to the loins and he plunged the starter down, swung the motor-cycle around and roared in the opposite direction from the drug-store to a drive-in café on Piedmont Road. At the kitchen door he bought a pint of whisky from a negro waiter and talked with him a few minutes standing just inside the hot room. When he went out and sat on the motor-cycle again he took a long straight drink of the throat-burning

whisky, holding his head thrown back and the bottle straight up above his mouth with the liquid gurgling out. Then he rasped his throat with his mouth wide open to let in the cold air, smacked his lips, and put the bottle in the pocket of his jacket. He rode back to the drug-store as fast as the motor-cycle would carry him. He was not drunk. He never drank to get drunk, only to keep warm, and he needed mightily to be warm now. He was happy and comfortable except for the cold, and he needed the warmth of the whisky in him for he knew to make the most of happiness when it came. He had spent a quarter of the drug-store's money when he bought the whisky, but he did not worry: on a bitch of a night like this, somebody was certain to tip him a quarter before closing time.

He made up the money that night, but two days later he used some to buy whisky again and this time he got into trouble. He had developed the misery. The pits of his arms ached, and he had waked up the second morning even before the alarm clock went off in the cold room where he slept. His eyes were swollen and aching, and when he opened his mouth his heavy lips fell back together dry and weak. But he could not sleep and he lay in the bed, dressed in most of his clothes except his boots, listening to one of his cousins across the room snore and pulling the one blanket up to keep himself warm until the blanket came loose from the foot of the bed and his feet stuck out uncovered. So he got up and went into the kitchen of the two-room house in which he lived with his mother, two sisters and a changing number of cousins. His mother gave him a cup of coffee which was already hot on the stove. He drank it without saying anything, and when she asked if he could lend her fifty cents he did not answer. At eight he left for work without yet feeling like he was out of bed, or awake, or warm.

He felt bad all day. He did not complain but he remained continually sitting on the gas radiator, silent and frowning. Right after suppertime he had a package to deliver and he met the girl without making any effort to. He drew up beside her and stopped with the motor still running. She talked to him as she always had, in the same undesiring tone which egged him on, but just before he left her she said:

'You just like my man. I guess all men is carnal all the world over.'

And as he rode to make the delivery he thought with annoyed satisfaction about what she had said. It was all right with him if she thought that all men were the same. That was the kind of disillusion which could make life sweet; he just hoped she would let it make life sweet for her and not bitter like the skinny ones did. But he did not want to think about her and he forced his thoughts to diffuse toward all the other girls he passed. She was not pretty anyway; it had just been her seeming never to flirt with him the way the flashy ones did that had challenged him, and now that he had had her he would rather turn his attention back to the flashy ones just as he would turn his attention from the soft sheen of an artificial pearl to the ruby red flash of a glass jewel. Then he was suddenly cold as he had been several times that day and he stopped by the drive-in café and bought a pint of whisky again. But this time he had to spend the whole dollar from his change money.

At eleven when he brought the motor-cycle into the store and parked it on the tile floor just inside the glass front doors he was seventy-five cents short. He did not say anything. He put his money, the two wadded dollar bills and the handful of change which he had counted three times in hope that it would be more, down on the glass counter at the side of the cash register and waited for the night pharmacist to count it. Anyway, he was lucky that the druggist who owned the store was not on duty. He did not feel like listening to him fuss.

'Where is the other seventy-five cents?' the pharmacist asked.

'I haven't got it,' Rosebud said.

'Why haven't you got it?'

'Cause.'

'Cause what?' the pharmacist mimicked.

'Cause I spent it for some whisky to get me warm.'

'Goddamn it, Rosebud, don't you know not to spend your change money?'

The pharmacist's question was not asked in anger but in exasperation that the negro insisted on putting himself in a position where he was forced to condemn him. Rosebud did not answer. There was nothing arrogant in his simple declaration, nothing defiant, and he did not mean to speak bluntly to the

pharmacist who was always friendly to him. But he felt as though he could not be servile to God Himself. He had no energy. His tiredness stared dumbly out of his eyes.

'All right, I'll put in the seventy-five cents myself and get it from you Saturday,' the pharmacist said. 'Now wait a minute and I'll fix you a dose of medicine before you go home. And you go home and to bed when you leave here and not out tomcatting around.'

'Yes, sir,' Rosebud said.

He caught the midnight car across town, got off at Fair Street and walked the blocks toward home. All he wanted was to get in the house and in bed. He climbed the stepless bank which, though it was dirt, was as rounded and bare and hard as rock, then he stood for a minute on the clay ground at the foot of the open ladder-like steps which rose before him to the porch of the house sitting up on four pillars of soft red brick and two four-by-fours at the front corners of the narrow high porch. In the room where he slept the window was covered with cardboard to keep out the wind and if his cousins were awake they would help him drink the whisky. So he sat on the bottom step in the clear cold moonlight of a landscape as dead as though it were the surface of the moon itself and finished the pint. Then he mounted the steps and went inside.

Tuesday. Wednesday. Thursday. Friday. Every day went the same. When his misery was too bad he took a drink of whisky and its warmth dissolved the aches which had become almost continual in his arms and legs. His head was heavy and he breathed through his mouth while he sat on the radiator. When he went outside into the cold air and took a drink of whisky the heaviness went away, and on the motor-cycle his body seemed no more feeling than the cold steel it rode. But when he came inside again the heaviness slowly returned and increased until another delivery was ready and he walked to the back of the store, the heels of his heavy boots clapping sharply on the tile floor, took the package and listened to the unpleasantness of the druggist, turned, walked out of the bright store into the clear cold dark again and mounted the motor-cycle. It was difficult to face the sneering of the druggist each time just when he was feeling worst, but

something he was waiting for seemed to keep him going from trip to trip.

Then it was Saturday again.

'I'll be all right,' he told himself. 'I'm tough enough not to let a little cold hurt me. If I gets to feeling worse I'll lay off for a day or two. But if a man starts letting little things like the weather stop him from doing what he wants to, he's gone. If a man starts losing guts to do what he wants to, he's gone and there ain't no use for him to take care so he can go on living without what he's living for. That's just stuff and nonsense. A little love ain't going to make me anything but better.'

He was parked at the side of the dark road feeling the cold slowly penetrate his clothing, listening to his breath whistle in and out of his mouth, watching for the soft sheen of his artificial pearl among the glass jewels of night. A feeling like a balloon being blown up inside him filled him as he waited. The way things were he would not have bothered with anybody else, but the excitement of wanting to see some sign of desire from all that undesiring flesh held him.

'Maybe feeling the way I feel I ought not to lie down anywhere but in a bed with covers over me,' he thought, 'but if you wait for luxuries in this life you're only going to make yourself miserable. The ground ain't never hurt nobody. Not for a little while. And maybe that gal won't come anyway. But she will, and now that she knows what she'll get she'll be in a hurry to get it. Besides, I feel better outside than in that store.'

He waited for her twenty minutes in the still cold dark. Then he saw her coming over the top of the hill walking toward him in the worn cloth coat just as before. She stopped at the side of the motor-cycle and spoke to him in the same expressionless voice, almost as low as a whisper, while his eyes darted over the features of her face and the outline of her figure beneath the cloth coat looking for some sign of desire. She only stood there and waited, but that silent waiting was enough for him. Then as if by magic the thickness of her coat wrapped figure was sitting on the motor-cycle, not behind him, but on the narrow cock of seat before him. His foot could not reach forward to stamp on the starter, and he got off and moved her behind him. She did not protest when he

led her into the pine trees this time, and when he rode her out of the pine trees and toward the carline on the main street she did not shiver and she did not protest. She crossed the street beneath the red, yellow, and green traffic light without saying anything.

'Love,' Rosebud said quietly to the curb boy, who was sitting on the radiator reading a movie magazine, when he returned to the store, 'there ain't nothing in this world like love. No, sir.'

And leaning against the hot metal of the radiator he rubbed his hand meditatively against the inside of his thigh.

Sunday morning he was not able to get out of the bed. When he put his hands against the mattress on either side of him to push himself up, nothing happened. It was as though he were pushing against the brick wall at the back of the drug-store, trying to push the building over. Nothing happened at all. He lay in bed slowly waking up to a feeling of weakness as though his bones had turned to water and were seeping out of him in sweat. He could feel his pulse beating like the rhythmical passage of waves through water, each wave passing all the way through him, and his eyes like two bags of hot water floating in the colder water of his body. When he tried to shake the feeling off as he had done each morning for almost a week, nothing happened at all.

One of his sisters went out to telephone the drug-store that he could not come to work. His mother brought him a cup of coffee to the bed and felt his forehead. When his sister came back they moved him to the cot in the kitchen and in the afternoon the doctor came.

He did not feel like making love then. Love had made him sick, but the thought of it made him want to be well again. In the afternoon it seemed to him that he had been in bed forever, that this was a new and different lifetime from that in which he had lived when he was well; and he felt that he did not have anything left from that other life. He raised his hand weakly before his face and stared at the thick pink padding of the palm, at the mounds beneath each of his fingers and at the thicker mound where his thumb joined his palm; but he could not feel that the flesh of all his lovers had curved beneath this hand or that the odour

of their bodies had been upon the weak body that now lay in his bed.

The idea of dying came to him first when the pharmacist from the store came to see him. It was the afternoon of the second day. He was lying in the bed in the kitchen with a blanket beneath him to keep off the wind which blew up through the cracks in the floor and a blanket over him to make him sweat. Then the pharmacist was standing above him saying his name.

‘Rosebud, how are you?’

And he knew that he had passed being just sick. He knew that it was something special when a white man came to his house to see him. His mother was moving about the room trying to make the little differences which she thought would change the white man’s impression of their home. He did not see his sisters anywhere. Then the room was silent and the space above him was empty. He looked up but he saw only the wooden ceiling. He could feel the sweat between his toes and the weight of the blanket on his feet, and he felt that if he was going to die it would be without anything.

A weak hot flood of resentment began to flow through his thoughts. He wanted to go back to his other life and to the things that had been about him in that life which were strong in his memory and more real than his weak body and the bed in which he lay: the back brick wall of the drug-store rising from the motorcycle and the garbage cans back of which he stood, rising up to the open sky white and cold with moonlight and so clear that he could see every one of the stars sharp and not at all blurred; the red raw bank of the railroad track beyond Collier Woods with the pine trees on one side and on the other the cinder path, the crossties and the track along which a gal was walking and singing while he lay with one hand across the mouth of another gal so she would not make a sound and watched the singing figure pass above him against a sky the colour of a faded blue dress with the light showing through; the top of Stone Mountain beneath a sky black and curved a few feet above the blaze of the camp fire and the laughter of the picnickers while he lay holding on to the cracks in the hard smooth side of the mountain where it was so curved and sloping that he felt he was going to fall into space. All these were more real to him even now than these four walls and this damned brown ceiling, and he wanted to have them back again.

Then it was the middle of the night and he was conscious for a long time when there was no movement and no light in the room and he could not see the ceiling but only the street light against the window and could hear only two people arguing in the street. He wanted to get up and go to the door and tell them to be off and to do their shouting somewhere else, but he could only lie in bed listening and staring at the dark. He saw the first girl that he had ever loved then, as she had been the night he had argued with her in the street before the house and told her that if she thought he was going to love only her she had another thought coming. Her figure unfolded suddenly and miraculously in the dark, bright coloured and so real that it seemed he could reach out and touch it. But he did not lift his hand from beneath the blanket. He had longed to touch the past on other occasions and he knew that he could not, that he could only try something new. Then he wanted furiously to be assured of the future. He wanted to feel that he would get all that was coming to him. He did not want to miss out on all the love that was his due just because he had gone out with one girl one night and gotten sick. She was not worth it. He could have had hotter ones and sweeter ones and better looking ones any night in the week. It did not matter to him whether her indifference felt him or not. Not now. Besides, that had been in another life. What mattered now was the assurance which he had so often felt, though he had never understood, that the hour of tomorrow at which he had a longed-for appointment would eventually arrive no matter what he did in the meantime and just as though the long hours of waiting had never been. But he was too weak to feel that assurance, and without it love was no comfort to remember. It never had been. Memory only increased the present desire. Yet he did not have the desire now, but only the need for the desire.

The consolations of the flesh went far, but only so far, and they had gone as far as they could go. As it began to grow light with morning, he wanted someone to come and give him something. He did not know what. His mother was asleep and the house was quiet, but he seemed to be barely alive and he wanted someone to come and give him something which would make him either well or dead. A weariness chilled his heart like the weariness which he had used to feel in his flesh when he was a boy and had seen and heard too many girls and touched too few—a weariness which

little by little for so long a time had mounted and tensened, though he had not known when it started, until each additional minute of life seemed more than he could bare yet never enough to break him. He felt so weak that he feared the wind of morning would shatter him the way it shatters an overblown rose. His flesh seemed to tremble and shatter from his bones as the cold light air of morning blew up from the earth beneath the house and through the cracks beneath the bed against him.

Through the morning he submitted passively to all which was done for him. The things which were done no longer made any difference. He waited passively for the time when he would be well again and on the motor-cycle roaring through the dark of the black roads along which gleamed the artificial jewels of night, the hard small bright moments that compensated for the pale empty stretch of time. It would be cool and fresh in the dark, but it was so warm in the pale room that he could hardly breathe.

Then it was the middle of the afternoon with the sun streaming through the window into his eyes. The dry roughness of the blanket was scratching his neck where the skin was weak and moist. His mother was sobbing in the corner of the room, and the insistent negro voice of the doctor was talking to her in a murmur so low that he knew they were talking about his death. And he was too weak to care. He realized that he had been thinking about dying for a long time now without being restless or angry. He had been remembering specific girls again, their flesh blossoming and fading in the dark red space before his closed eyes, and thinking that he would never see them or any others again. But he was not angry. He was too weak to be angry. He wanted only either to be well again or to be dead. Death was like everything else in life, and he accepted it. He had gotten only love out of life—perhaps he had gotten life out of only love—and it was better to die of what he had lived by than to die of something which had no connexion to him, better to die of love than to be run over by an automobile driven by someone he did not even know. He was satisfied. Only the afternoon sunlight was too bright in his eyes.

The druggist was supporting himself with one hand on either side of the passage which led from the store to the prescription room. It was time for him to go home for the night, but he was

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talking to an important customer from the apartment house across the street and he had not changed from his work jacket. He was supporting himself because he had drunk a good bit of grain alcohol that afternoon and he felt that he had a right to hold on to anything in the store if he liked. It was his store and he could take care of anybody else who did not like it.

‘That goddamned nigger drank and stayed out on the side of the road when he ought to have been back here in the store working. I’m sorry he’s dead. He was as good as the sons of bitches go. But you can tell that you can’t give them any responsibility, any money, anything, because they just throw away what you do give them. I’m standing right here and telling you that I’ve never drunk one drop of whisky in the twenty years I’ve been running this drug-store. And I don’t ask of the men that work for me anything that I don’t ask of myself. But by God when you treat them decent and give them a fair chance, it makes you mighty goddamned depressed to see them throw away every chance to live a decent life for nothing. Nothing! By God, it makes you depressed.’

The customer, who had come out to walk his Boston bull and buy a package of bromoseltzer, left. The druggist went into the back of the store, took off his work jacket, and came out again putting on his suit coat. His overcoat was on his arm and before he put it on he stood a minute surveying the store. A new candy display had been put up that afternoon on top of the perfume case and the case looked dowdy beneath the bright boxes.

‘I want you to take all the perfume out of that case and clean the shelves and put it back tonight,’ he said. ‘Make it look as good as the display on top. Maybe we do make a good profit on perfume, but we don’t make it if it just sits there and evaporates, by God.’

‘Yes, sir,’ the soda jerker answered.

‘And I want you to keep an eye on that new delivery boy and see that he doesn’t get off on the wrong foot the way that other one did.’

‘Yes, sir, Mister Warren, we’ll do that.’

The druggist was walking past the perfume counter now, putting on his overcoat and frowning into space. He did not look at the two men he was leaving but when he reached the door and opened it he called:

‘Good-night.’

No one answered.

UMBRO APOLLONIO

THE PAINTING OF GIORGIO MORANDI

TODAY Giorgio Morandi is recognized to be the greatest living Italian painter and he is given a place amongst the major artists of the world. But though since his earliest years he has enjoyed the respect of many critics and writers, his renown is mainly due to the latter rather than the former. Even the most penetrating official art critics were slow to give his painting the attention it deserved. Roberto Longhi was the first to single out Morandi's work for its distinguished qualities. That was in 1935, in Longhi's introductory lecture to a course on art history at Bologna University. He was talking about Bolognese painting and his reference to Morandi has since become famous. But the earliest full dress appreciation of the artist only came in 1942 when Cesare Brandi published his book¹ in a full version—a less ample draft had appeared three years earlier in a review.² In 1939 came Arnaldo Beccaria's volume³ with its acute observations. In 1941 we had Giuseppe Raimondi's exquisite and penetrating commentary for Morandi's drawings.⁴ This was followed in 1948 by the same author's monograph on the engravings.⁵ Raimondi's work shows a long acquaintance with the artist, but it has not prevented him from emphasizing important points with great critical accuracy. The year 1946 brought a book by Cesare Gnudi.⁶ This cast light on many problems and dealt with what Morandi has to teach, and contained able reflections on his poetic vision. Other *mises au point* are to be found in the preface Roberto Longhi wrote for Morandi's one-man exhibition in Florence in 1945,⁷ and in the

¹ C. Brandi, *Morandi*, Le Monnier, Florence 1942.

² C. Brandi, 'Cammino di Morandi' in the review *Le Arti*, Rome, January-February 1939.

³ A. Beccaria, *Giorgio Morandi*, Hoepli, Milan 1939.

⁴ G. Raimondi, 'Cartella di Disegni', *Le Arti*, Rome, February-March 1941.

⁵ G. Raimondi, 'Le Stampe di Giorgio Morandi', in *Proporzioni II*, Sansoni, Florence 1948.

⁶ C. Gnudi, *Morandi*, Edizioni U, Florence 1946.

⁷ R. Longhi, Prefazione al catalogo della Mostra di Giorgio Morandi alla Galleria 'Il Fiore', Florence 1945.

writings of Alessandro Parronchi,¹ Michelangelo Masciotta,² Lamberto Vitali,³ Giuseppe Marchiori⁴ and Francesco Arcangeli.⁵

Besides these there have been various testimonies of affection and informative statements by friends or ones of literary or biographical interest. But they add little to our critical and historical appreciation of the painter's development. The writers I have already mentioned have enough authority to guarantee Morandi's level of poetry and truth. This poetry and truth is intimately bound up with a reality that is entirely of the spirit. It is solid and concrete in the figurative image and is entirely free from intellectual artifice or the intentions of extraneous suggestion. And so it is one of the clearest and sublimest expressions of contemporary painting.

It is distressing to observe how outside circumstances, even when not deliberately hostile, have prevented Morandi's vital and masterly painting from being widely acclaimed and above all from being widely known—two things that go far to helping the success of an artist and of what he has to teach. Morandi has a reserved nature. He is shy about any kind of publicity and also cautious about making intimate confidences even to his closest friends. These characteristics have helped to provoke a situation that I am never tired of lamenting. On the other hand we must remember that the highest form of poetry or poetic vision is born and is developed far from the madding crowd—in the secret humanity of a meditation that is captious and jealous of its own rights.

'It is not easy to say when this work achieved maturity,' remarks Giuseppe Raimondi.⁶ Morandi's painting has been firm since his earliest efforts, and these go back to 1911. In the five subsequent years, that is until 1916, we find him dwelling on the inheritance of Cézanne, but with a mastery of his subject that

¹ A. Parronchi, *Nomi della Pittura Italiana Contemporanea*, Arnaud, Florence 1944.

² M. Masciotta, 'Omaggio a Morandi', in *Letteratura*, Florence, January-March 1941.

³ L. Vitali, *L'Incisione Italiana Moderna*, Hoepli, Milan, 1934.

⁴ G. Marchiori, 'Giorgio Morandi', *Corriere Padano*, Ferrara, 25 February 1939.

⁵ F. Arcangeli, 'Novità de Morandi', in *Il Mondo*, Florence, 5 October 1946.

⁶ G. Raimondi in *Proporzioni*, art. cit.

risers far above mere facile or external copying, and with a spontaneous discipline of feeling that brings a calm and tranquil intensity to the results of his work. His process of expression is already on a sure path. Already at this stage we can notice his solicitude over the potentiality of light, for relating objects and over the search for a correspondence between light and volume, colour and space. This solicitude lies at the heart of his work. From it, as he proceeds on his path, his various epochs will take their rise like a series of happy constellations. Each of the latter will carry a particular accent. None will ever be a mere chance prompting due to the inattention of a moment. Each will be a manifestation of his interior richness and harmony of spirit.

A friend who knew him during those early years has testified—a point we must not forget—that Morandi experienced his first revelation of modern painting when, at Venice in 1910, he saw the work of Renoir. At that time he only knew Cézanne through reproductions. Roberto Longhi has recorded the list of favourite painters over which he and Morandi lingered. In it Cézanne was given last place. He was preceded by Giotto, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Bellini, Titian, Chardin, Corot and Renoir—in that order.¹ I am unable to agree with Brandi when he says that the figurative motives we find in Morandi at an early stage of his development showed he was detached from Cézanne and was deviating towards Kandinsky. The hypothesis of Roberto Longhi,² as developed and defined by Giuseppe Raimondi,³ relating this epoch of the painter to meditations on Derain seems to me much preferable. Within the limits of my not very persuasive research for significant references perhaps it may also be worth recalling an occasion on which my friend Francesco Arcangeli, with whom I was admiring the frescoes of Vitale da Bologna at Mezzaretta, called my attention to a basket of flowers and fruit whose tone was clear, gentle and precise—something very akin to Morandi's tender colouring. This similarity between Morandi's colouring and that of Vitale was also pointed out by Carlo Savoia in 1939.⁴ There are various examples of how he

¹ R. Longhi in his Prefazione.

² R. Longhi in his Prefazione.

³ G. Raimondi in *Proporzioni*.

⁴ C. Savoia, 'Giorgio Morandi' in the *Rivista del Comune*, Bologna, March-April 1939.

began making use of the pulsation of light within objects. This was achieved because his mastery enabled him to use subtlety and caution in evading merely naturalistic impressions, discarding their violence and incorporating them into his colour substance. We have only to think of the Vitali collection in Milan (landscapes of 1911), the Jesi collection in Milan and the Feroldi collection in Brescia (landscapes of 1914). And if the still life of 1914 in the Longanesi collection (Rome) suggests an experience parallel to that of Derain in various other works—the 1916 still life in the present writer's possession, those of the Feroldi collection (Brescia) and above all the 'Flowers' of the Rollino collection (Rome)—we see a coincidence of light and colour in which each infiltrates the other, thus achieving a new richness and tenderness of feeling and a new figurative 'closedness' and 'togetherness'.

We can easily see how Morandi's deep sense of style avoided a surrender to literary and 'metaphysical' painting. His convictions were too solid to permit obedience to simple formulae. He achieved his formation by meditating on the quality and effectiveness of his texts, never owing to the singularity and attraction of illustrations. With the widely admired 1911 landscape in the Vitali collection we see his efforts beginning to take solid shape and at the same time the significance of one of nature's miracles. No one can reproach him for using his tools illogically; and he has never let himself be caught by distraction, haste or surprise. The painter moves with a tempo in which there is no disequilibrium. He is faced with a spectacle that has reposed for long in his mind and spirit, so that now there only remains the schema that supports the image—this is irreducible because in direct correspondence with the intensity of spirit that generates it. Morandi detaches himself from what he sees so as to preserve it for ever in his figurative rendering of the interior echo it excites. And therefore the elements of his pictures have a relationship as if they were alive. Morandi avoids all habit and his attention is always being renewed by the discovery of rare voices that are faithfully bound up with his experiences; and these, on each occasion, he weighs up and poises so as to give authority to his sureness of vision. He is thus never a victim of pretence, whether of time or theme, and the measure of his fidelity is constant. 'For which reason, though he never gives you a sense of radical renewal, Morandi never provides a feeling of stasis—always one of

tireless novelty.¹ To begin with he empties each element of its weight of matter. He never uses it to put on a show whose significance needs to be apprehended in terms beyond those of the canvas. Finally he decides on the relations whose absolute and intact presence can enclose the secret and delicate breath of a world of spirit. Gnudi was right when he spoke of Morandi's 'deep recollection in seeking out and regarding an objective truth that he is always finding anew in himself and reaffirming'²—the truth here being precisely the reality both of the man and the artist. Gnudi describes Morandi's process of creating as 'a long pose: the image rises slowly to the fire of his objective inwardness: what moves and passes is cancelled: there only remains what is motionless, what scarcely trembles as it receives the eternal and ever-renewed miracle of light'. Could a 'metaphysical' significance possibly be given for instance, to the architectural mouldings spread out on one plane that we see in the still life of 1916 in the present writer's possession? May it not be that they only exist for that substance that has reduced them to one single surface? May it not be that the gentle sweetness of the 'Flowers' in the Rollino collection (1916) is the conquest of an ancient wisdom, of a poetry afterwards forgotten? Indeed, it must be confessed before all else that many of our artists, dead or living, in Italy or abroad, even the most admirable ones, have been helped by a kind of cleverness that might be called purely technical—maybe hidden in echoes of culture, or maybe grafted on to the enjoyment of the intelligence—and compared with them Morandi seems the most natural of painters and the one most lacking in expedients of every kind. So that when one looks at one of his pictures there are no intervening factors, no transcriptions to detect: the origins of the form spring solely from quiet attention to the interior life. Those tempted to find forbears for his imagery have based themselves on the testimony of some of his earlier work and mentioned the name of Cézanne. But by and large both Brandi³ and Gnudi⁴ would admit that he never adopted Cézanne's manner in an exterior way; that he saw in Cézanne's work no more than a process of creation corresponding to his own—that is, he saw the

¹ F. Arcangeli, art. cit.

² C. Gnudi, op. cit.

³ C. Brandi, op. cit.

⁴ C. Gnudi, op. cit.

necessity of disciplined equilibrium to give an everlasting validity both to feeling and to his special relationship with the world.

And so it is even less possible to speak of 'metaphysical painting' in connexion with Morandi than it is in the case of Carrà. It may well be that, during the short space of a year, 'metaphysical' painting gave him a point of departure, assisted him to direct his experience and helped him to find in his vision and representation an element with which to integrate his store of formal data. But for all that when he chose an object it was not to turn it into a medium or attribute. The object always retained its value as a form suitable for assisting expression.

At a given moment he began to experience in terms of space the repose he had brought to bear on a two-dimensional surface—thus attaining a new plastic interest. The canvases he then produced were no more than a necessary passage from a kind of firm, extended and geometrical composition to a more physical and chromatic richness. The transposition of the elements selected always happens through the achievement of a harmony, and that is why the mannikin is no longer a mannikin but an ovoid; that is, it becomes a form with its own special voice, it is never a mere basis emanating an analogical suggestion. Whereas with De Chirico the biscuit when placed beside abstract forms always counts as a biscuit, it was aimed at arousing sensations of a very varied and inexplicable kind—Morandi turns a loaf of bread into a form and colour that is inserted beside another form and colour. (In this connexion consider the 1918 still life in the Jucker collection in Milan.) The bottle and fruit dish in the 1918 still life of the Feroldi collection are truth recreated, they are strictly opposed in meaning to these things as we see them in real life. Were this not so, I too would end up by accepting the literature that has grown up round Morandi, and see him as the poet of humble objects, as decadent, monotonous and melancholy: a kind of Gozzano of painting.

The works of 1915–20 have all the precision and continuity that unifies the work of a genuine artist. When he had established a corpus of colour for his fixed surface images Morandi transferred his woof to perspective, to three dimensions, and developed the rhythmical sequence in a solid and plastic way. The simple distribution of the component data underwent a similar development. Fundamentally his standard remained what it was for the still

lives of 1916. Only the colour, formerly constrained in the profiles, is now isolated in the volumes, which have a certain optical appearance—but it is still delicate and spread out. The 1919 still life in the Jesi collection show how he is filling out the whole of the space, gaining in thickness and doing away almost entirely with margins. In the still life of 1920 in the Vitali collection he achieves a plastic background on which the painting becomes a trembling unity that binds the objects together in a luminous, fluid and indissoluble space. Space, first represented on one plane, and then cubed, now changes into a graduation of light that transforms everything with quivering tones. At this point Morandi reached the first stage of his maturity. And little indeed of this was inspired by De Chirico. It would be more accurate to think that he had turned to Carrà—perhaps the Carrà of the ‘Hermaphrodite Idol’ (1917) or the ‘Drunken Gentleman’ (1916). But he never achieved Carrà’s enamel brightness. Instead he poured out his natural tones that even today seem incomparable for their concrete adherence to the image and their correspondence to a sublime internal necessity—while they lose none of the evocative freshness of the external reality that was their point of departure. Round about 1919 his development of structure acquired a depth that accentuates dimension, so that the result is a kind of intermediary cubism as though seen with the enchanted eyes of a Douanier (think of some of the flowers painted round 1910 by that extraordinary artist)—that is to say, it is applied over his own independent vision. ‘But the object, far from becoming an enigma, or counting as an abstract component in a charade of design, allows one to continue perceiving the reflection of the natural context to which it belongs.’¹

The formal and concrete quality that now achieves expression of a sublime quality is combined with chastity and nudity. The profiles, now removed from the reality that dictated them, live on in their chromatic space grown thicker with relationships but still intact. The still lifes now have a light and unified tenderness, they are established in their interior recollection, and colour is laid on in a slow and impalpable deposit. Whereas with De Chirico space conserved its physical character, though mannered by result of a contracted anguish of spirit, with Morandi it is recomposed into the stable atmosphere drawn from the controlled

¹ C. Brandi, *op. cit.*

pulsations of deep and calm tranquillity. This atmosphere is never altered by any need other than that of deepening the resultant expression.

The 1916 landscape, with its 'crooked divisions of zones'¹ and with a homogeneous precision of structure sustained by the sensitive quality of the colour, already shows an intellectual firmness that was to be outstanding as framework for his central creative achievement. In that year Morandi designed his phantasms on a vertical plane, they were reduced to surface projections, but the complexity of the picture and the avoidance of degeneration into a mere arabesque, must even then, be ascribed to his diffused application of colour. (Compare the delicate charm of the 'Flowers' in the Rollino collection to which I have already referred.) But by 1918 we find him making a kind of trial with volumes, a lathework of solids attached to a central point of perspective. We are in the enchanted room, a space dominated by the constant register of the chromatic bond—though still unable to absorb the chiaroscuro that is really needed, and to grasp the contribution of shadows as distinct from reliance on the suggestivity of light as illumination. This period of Morandi's painting has a brightness that derives from the 'metaphysical' artists, but colour, with its power to conciliate, is germinating in it. Then, in the 1920 still life of the Vitali collection that I have already mentioned, we see the first clear manifestation of the gradual process towards the achievement of unity. This corresponds to Morandi's conquest of the interior clarity by which he resolved his oscillation between being dominated by the object and treating it as a symbol. After he had thought over formulating his work in terms of an arrangement of surfaces and had tried out organic structure based on two dimensions, Morandi came to revel in colour as a rare yet truly effective precision instrument for a language that was genuine and a spirit that was concrete. Though his painting at this period is rich in values that are absolute, if unresolved and ambiguous, it cannot be comprehended in 'metaphysical' terms. In all modern art it is hard to find precedents or comparisons for it. Its development is autonomous and is so free and genuine that we can claim justification for calling it the greatest figurative manifestation of our time. Like Carrà, Morandi kept faith with his reality, he developed in one and the same

¹ C. Brandi, *op. cit.*

climate of concord, and the standards that always dominated him were those of a self-attentive spirit. If others were drawn to inconclusive or contaminated or ambitious aims Morandi, as to incorruptible truth, preserved his loyalty to the clarity he had discovered at the outset of his career. Only certainty can guarantee continuance.

In 1918, as we can see from the 'Flowers' of the Vitali collection, he tried his hand at plastic contrasts that were to melt into good grouping. A certain lack of precision here—and this was the time of rigid and enchanted variations—has disappeared by the time of the 'Vase of Flowers' (1920) in the same collection. According to Giuseppe Raimondi¹ at a moment towards the end of 1919 Morandi was interested in modelling by means of light—for this he had found support in certain works of Ingres, Raphael and Caravaggio that he had come across about that time. But though he doubtless experienced some emotion when he contemplated those paintings, he so worked over the secrets they revealed to him that he transferred what he got from them into something personal and hence absolutely new.

The years 1921–4 were a period of assiduous dedication to engraving—the time of some of his loveliest plates. The delicate change-overs between white and black make an exquisite texture, and constant rigour guides the warp to create an evanescent and decisive charm, and harmony on which the gentle and silvery light trembles. The extreme confines of poetry are reached by his ever watchful sense of order, the extraordinary simplicity of his method and the injection of quivering modulations. But there is wisdom and tenacity in scanning the rhythms as in engraving the plates. These qualities go hand in hand with his intuition of measure in lyricism and style, born at the same time as the image. The painter has the truest and fullest awareness of the image rooted within him and this gives his work its new and rare strength.

While he was applying himself with assiduity to engraving, Morandi was also busy creating a colour texture in painting capable of absorbing the efforts at volume and perspective that he pursued during his so-called 'metaphysical' period. As Brandi² has pointed out, around 1920 'he achieved the fusion of the

¹ G. Raimondi in *Proporzioni*, art. cit.

² C. Brandi, op. cit.

dualism between construction in perspective and chromatic structure and from then onwards the various formal solutions in Morandi's painting always looked back to this point of fusion'. This is borne out by the 1920 still life in the Cardazzo collection (Venice), the 1921 still lifes of the Jesi collection, the 'Flowers' of 1923 in the same collection and those of 1925 in the Pellizzi collection (Rome). Also by the 1925 landscape of the Malaparte collection, the 1924 still life of the Faccincani collection (Rome), and the 1925 still lifes both in the Rollino collection and the Vallacchi collection in Florence.

The years 1927-33 brought a second period of intense activity at engraving. In the wonderful series of engravings of these years the unsurpassable harmony of the variety of the tonal network derives from the genuineness of the spirit planning and executing it. The objects have now reached an unflinching firmness of figurative achievement and the 'pauses' that separate them are filled with a flux of relationships that seem like echoes or affiliations conjoining them. All breathe one and the same atmosphere to which they belong, in which they coexist—and this atmosphere unifies the creative force, the lymph within that confers identity of value on each element and enables it to germinate incomparable and autonomous forms.

Colour, so far rather thin, became heavier during those years, and he used it with more nuances. This is not so obvious in the 1927 and 1928 still lifes of the Jesi or Vitali or Faccincani collections as in the 1930 still life in the Albonetti collection in Rome. In the 1930 still lifes in the Feroldi (Brescia), Messina (Milan) and Cardazzo (Venice) collections colour is reduced again. By 1935 Morandi reached a suffused almost cloudy delicateness, in which the objects lose their bodily appearance. An example of this is afforded by the still life in the Martellotti collection in Rome. We see a similar unification of composition, the correlation of objects together in saturating light, yet with slight 'pauses' in the melodic scansion of the tones, in the 1936 landscape of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Rome, in the still life belonging to the Contessa Pecci-Blunt (Rome) and that of 1938 in the Jesi collection. Volume is laid out detachedly, but the light reverberates and refuses to inform it and make it evident. As regards distances a sharper accent of colour would have much the same effect.

The painting of this period is compact, at times rather heavy and lined with folds of shadow, but it is always confident and full in tone. It was of great interest to Mafai—in whose formation the work of Scipione also played its part—and then, in conjunction with other motives, it became one of the chief founts of that emphasis on tone that came to be known as ‘the Roman school’, as exemplified in the latest developments of painters such as Scialoja and Stradone. This, the only echo of any importance that Morandi’s painting has had amongst contemporaries, shows that the latest generation has not been indifferent to such a guide and leader. Though, as happens not uncommonly, if we compare what has been derived from him with the work of the original master, the former seems to go little beyond the limits of mannered elaboration.

From 1940 onwards Morandi worked in clearer colours—he set them on the canvas as though with a gasp of exhaustion. The painter seemed at last to be freed definitively from the struggle between two opposing forces—light and shadow—that he has always tried to pacify. He has now become absolute master of all the emotions. The latter become more distant and at the same time density disappears for good. The firm and gentle stage, with its rare and serene tenderness of accords, wins victory at last. The whites seem tinted with pale light and the objects are held together in the centre of the painting so as to make a sort of little castle with exquisite harmonies and echoes that beat like a scarcely perceptible pulse. The ‘Flowers’ in the Ventura collection (Florence), and the landscapes of the Gnudi, Vitali and Rollino collections all belong to 1940. Pictures of 1941 include the still lifes of the Feroldi and Vitali collections and the landscapes of the Cardazzo collection. Outstanding in 1942 is the landscape of the Jesi collection. The still lifes of the Pallini (Milan) and Jesi collections represent 1943; the still life in the Rome Galleria d’Arte Moderna represents 1945; and the still life belonging to Giuseppe Raimondi in Bologna, 1946.

Today Morandi is helped on his way by his noble lyricism and the poetry of his work—the exercise of a daily praise of all that is noblest in the soul—is an offering as well as a lesson to be learnt. The simplicity of his expression derives from a meditation counted off hour by hour. It is an element of clarification, the participation in a truth proceeding from a spiritual history whose most

deeply felt aims are absorbed into the poetry he unearths. In the over-crowded and often uncertain world of contemporary art Morandi appears as a fixed point. We can dwell on his work without problems or doubts. True poetry has always been presented to our wondering eyes with this confidence and simplicity.

MEYER LIBEN

THE PERILS OF TRADE

IN my type of business, the buying and selling of General Merchandise, domestically and internationally, one becomes accustomed to all sorts of curiosities, takes for granted happenings before which a more sensitive (or less desensitized) individual might recoil.

We have a saying for this: *It is all in the Day's Business.*

This means: If it can be bought, and if it can be sold, there is nothing so remarkable about it.

For example: In one of the many circulars which comes to my desk detailing War Surplus Commodities open for bid, there was a line which caught my attention.

'*Second-Hand Dwarfs*—located at such-and-such an island in the Pacific—excellent condition, etc.'

This line caught my attention because I had recently been the agent in the purchase of a Czechoslovakian castle for a retired grain speculator, who, just before he set sail, asked me to be on the look-out for any accessories which I thought might be fitting or useful in this type of home.

Now it is well known that no castle can be considered fully appointed unless there is available a dwarf whose chief duty is to sleep each night outside his mistress's door.

I checked the line and handed the circular to my secretary, noting what I thought would be a fair price for an item of this sort. She handled the transaction in the routine way.

(Back of my mind was an image of a small Pacific island, uprooted in some diversionary tactic of the war, these little people milling around, until some exasperated bureaucrat filed them under

the head of Surplus Commodities and so they found their way to my desk.)

Three weeks later, under the errata listings, was the notation: '*Second-Hand Dwarfs*—should read *Second-Hand Wharfs*—such-and-such a port in the Pacific—excellent condition, etc.'

My secretary brought this erratum to my attention.

'What would a second-hand wharf be?' she inquired, exasperated.

This is the girl who fainted the following week under circumstances which prove that no matter how one accommodates himself to the unlikely and weird (by a cowardly self-preserving process which turns every unlikely happening into a likely happening) there is sure to be some trivial occurrence in the course of the day's business which takes on the proportions of a disaster.

Returning from lunch I found my secretary out cold on the floor. It took me some time to revive her, and the only words she spoke during this period sounded like: 'King Kong'. She held a letter tightly gripped; it was impossible to take this letter from her without tearing it away. I decided to wait.

When she revived, she was dazed, shook her head in bewilderment at the questions I asked her. I asked about the letter. She did not seem to understand, gazed blankly at the sheet, moaned, and then opened her hand in a kind of resigned despairing gesture. I picked up the letter.

The letterhead was of a Hong Kong firm, one unfamiliar to me. After my trade name and address, both correctly written, and the salutation:

'Gentlemen:'

there was nothing, a blank page.

I admit to a certain tremor of fear at the sight of this blank page. Precisely the point of a business letter to give and ask for *information*, and here nothing. This is surprising; there is certainly no business to be transacted here.

My common sense came to my aid. I saw exactly what had happened. The man (for it was a man's handwriting) had just started on the letter when he was called away, somehow distracted. Then, having thought the letter through, it was as though he had written it. Having written it, he mailed it.

This blank page was rather funny—I determined to write a humorous reply. Something like:

‘Dear Sir:

‘Have received yours of the 12th instant, and lack of contents noted,’

or

‘Thank you for your interesting letter of recent date, but I would appreciate your clearing up a few puzzling statements.’

A glance at my secretary quickly dissuaded me from this course. She was pale, trembling, gazed vacantly out the window. I sent her home for the day.

(A woman is absent-minded—this means that the repressed material is in a state of activity. At this moment there is a blow from the outside—a slip of the eye revives a primal fantasy—overwhelmed by a primate. The repressed material, in a state of activity, is galvanized. Defences are overthrown. The woman faints.)

I spent the remainder of the afternoon clearing up some work, also writing a few letters which had to be mailed that day. The work went slowly—I was quite absent-minded, my thoughts reverted to old scenes, memories I thought were buried forever, people long dead or long out of my life.

It grew late, the room darkened, my gloom deepened. I shook my head vigorously, to shake out the unpleasant thoughts.

‘Back to work,’ I said, ‘before you too are hurled to the floor.’

What I meant was: Back to this acceptable madness which protects you from the hidden self. Let this self appear, then you will first appreciate this madness. As mad as you become, you will never exceed this madness which you have lived under the guise of sanity, this madness which protects you from nothing but love, truth, and reality.

What I should have meant was: What a providential blow! to cleave the armoured soul, make way for the despised love, truth and reality.

LAWRENCE DURRELL

STUDIES IN GENIUS

VIII—HENRY MILLER

AN invitation to give some account of the writings of Henry Miller comes very appositely since I have just completed a re-reading of all his available work with a view to making a representative selection from it for his American publishers. On the other hand I should make it clear at once that my own association and friendship with him has, in the opinion of many common friends, made me over-indulgent to what they consider his defects as a writer. I rate him too highly, they tell me. He lacks all sense of form . . . ('They say I must have form, blast them,' writes D. H. Lawrence somewhere. 'They mean their own miserable skin-and-grief form'). Miller, in the same context, replied to a criticism of mine thus: 'You keep bellyaching about form. I'm against the form that's imposed from the outside, the dead structure. My books represent germination in all its phases.'

'Germination', the word is a key to many of the intentions of Miller in his writings; it is the key to what Miller feels himself to be—a fecundating force expressing itself through writing, not a 'literary man' or an 'artist'. The distinction is worth underlining for the shape and colour of this writer's work is dictated by his attitude to art and the world of which that art is a reflection.

There seem to be two distinct types of creative man. The first controls his material and shapes it. The second delivers himself over, bound hand and foot to his gifts. The first belongs to the family of Pope, the second to the family of Lawrence, of Blake. With this second type of artist it is useless to agitate for measure, form, circumspection. They are entirely mantic, delivered over to their pneuma. It is very exasperating, for almost any one of us talented fellows could show Blake how to improve his work, or Lawrence how to achieve the form he lacked with the artificial aid of a blue pencil. But we should then be guilty, I have no doubt, of missing the whole meaning and content of the work of such artists—for the meaning resides not only in the work as a whole unit, but also in the life of its creator, and in the struggle that went into the making of the work. Unless we are prepared to admit

that this type of creative man is *making use* of his art in order to grow by it; in order to expand the domains of his own sensibility, we will be unable to profit by what he has to offer us, which is the vicarious triumph of *finding ourselves* in reading him. The imperfections of his art come from an honourable admission that he wishes to grow. He does not wish to sever the umbilical cord connecting him to his creation. He wraps himself more and more deeply in the coloured cocoon of his personal mythology until it is quite impossible for you to do more than reject him utterly, or accept him unreservedly. With the other type of artist, the great formalist who resides in a Joyce or a Proust, you find another attitude—that of the embalmer. Such artists are tied to a memory, to location, to a precise age and cultus. They condense and refine. They sum up their lives in a great complete metaphor from one determined standpoint. They are the real artists, says a friend, while the others are ‘adventurers in literature’ properly speaking, whose topic is growth, efflorescence, being. This may well be true. Certainly the latter type of artist makes a greater demand upon us. We have to accustom ourselves to his tone of voice, which is often irritating or unpleasant. Yet in an age where our literature is coming more and more to resemble an exchange of common-room debating-points wrapped in impeccable prose or verse, the work of such hungry time-spirits as Miller and Lawrence has a very special function. The new psyche of the age will be born of their desperate struggles, one feels. Merit and defect are somehow irrelevant to their work. What matters is the personality, the key, the tone of voice. They remind us that literature is something more than an electric massage for the over-educated ego, or a formal garden in which the critic can take his Peke for a run. It is a wilderness in which one can find or lose oneself, and where the object of creation is not only to produce ‘works of art’ but to become more and more oneself in doing so.

The comparison of Lawrence and Miller is inevitable. Despite many differences of temperament and talent there are several points of reference worth noting. They both belong to the generation which, under the influence of Bergson and Spengler, opted for a vitalist view of history, and an anti-intellectual metaphysic. One makes such ascriptions light-heartedly enough in critical essays—but here I would like to emphasize that for the creative man the whole world of philosophic or religious ideas is

simply a sort of harem from which he chooses now this pretty concubine, now that. We say that X is Theosophist or a Bergsonian: but it would be very difficult to criticize his work entirely in terms of either proposition. Readers of Mr. Louis MacNeice's excellent study of Yeats will perhaps remember the closing chapters in which the author confesses to a certain bewilderment at the *inconsistency* of his subject. The truth is that the artist is at his most amoral when he reaches the domain of ideas. He is concerned, of course, not with the dialectical truth of ideas, but simply with their beauty and appositeness to his own temperamental make-up. He chooses often exactly the *opposite* of what he is, simply in order to provide a counter-balance to his own over-balanced sensibility. Yeats felt an almost sensual attraction for the calm of the Indian sages. His own rosy, romantic Irish sensibility needed something of the sort to contain its disorders. With this reservation in mind one might ascribe Miller's intellectual pedigree partly to Bergson and Spengler, partly to Freud, and partly to Hindu and Chinese religion. Certain elements are easier to isolate than others. The following quotations from *The Hamlet Letters* outline his attitude more clearly than I could do.

'It's your marvellous analytic mind which will not rest content until the subject has been torn to tatters . . . You must take it between your fingers, metaphorically speaking, and rend it to bits . . . You are like a savage who takes the watch apart to find out what makes it go, but like the savage again you neither find out what makes it go nor can you put the watch together again. You are left with a beautiful piece of destruction on your hands—a capable job, but what avail? Listen, *must* we know what makes the watch go? Isn't it enough to know what time it is? . . . Of course I am against the known . . . When you say that Knowledge is my great Bugaboo, you are absolutely right. But to go on and say that I detest science, metaphysics, religion, etc—sticking one's finger into the Unknown, as you say—because I might bring up something horrible, *the truth*, that is not true. The fact is that truth is not arrived at that way. The exploration of the unknown yields only the known. We discover only what we set out to find, nothing more. Truth on the other hand comes instantaneously, without search. *Truth is*, as Krisnamurti says. You don't win it. It comes to you as a gift, and to receive it you must be in the proper state. All this is nonsense to you, I know . . . It's just a

piece of mysticism, if you like, which keeps me gay and fit. The unknown is constant and the advances we make into it are illusory. I love the unknown precisely because it is a "beyond", because it is impenetrable.'

The surrender to the flux of individual life; the life which marks the history of individual and nation alike, is an article of faith with both Miller and Lawrence; and in both of them we see, over and over again, the attempt to emphasize the creative rebirth of the *individual*, and the rise of the human spirit to full consciousness. That both share a didactic purpose goes without saying. Their work offers us what is really a religious message. To be reborn with every breath one draws and every line one writes, suggests the spiritual athletic of the mystic rather than the patient and prescient interest of an artist in a form determined, in a tract of experience digested and finished with.

'Suddenly your whole life seems like a grand eclipse; the sun was blacked out and you had never imagined that there was a sun but only this black spot in front of your eyes, only you yourself and your idea of life. Then suddenly the cataract is removed, and suddenly you see . . . The labour of putting two and two together you leave to the blind . . . When a man gets this sight havoc seizes the world. The philosophers and the historians may say that the time is not ripe—the time is never ripe for the historians and philosophers, except in the past—but the man who suddenly sees announces the time and the time is always ripe because it is one with his vision. To break this man, to destroy this vision, requires centuries and centuries of future time. And even then the vision is never completely destroyed. Another man arises and it is the same vision. No time for writing books, no time for building philosophies. The man simply says what he sees and goes straight to his death. He walks seeing and saying, each step he makes, each word he utters a clear, clean break with the past. He has no memory, no hope, no regrets. Neither has he wife nor friends. Nor has he loyalty. He moves straight on with ice-cold compassion, the supreme master of irony, the chief actor in the drama of man. When we attempt to describe the pattern of such a life we create a spider-web in which we are strangled . . .'

'Man has a pattern but he seldom lives according to it. Man's pattern is God, but he refuses to recognize it as a creation . . . Man oscillates between God and the Devil. He is seldom man . . .'

'Man is a creator. And to create means to destroy at the same time. To destroy usually gives us pleasure but to create produces a sense of guilt. Why? Because to create entails responsibility. We create out of a sense of insufficiency. Our longing to be understood is only a reflection of our fear of trespassing. A creative act is in the nature of a trespass. It is a violation of the static order of things. We say we want to be understood, but in reality it is the anticipation of war which makes us tremble with joy and apprehension. Every creative act is a declaration of war. And war is man's pattern.'

But the Heraclitean proposition expresses a paradox: that it is only by the acceptance of the war, the reconciliation of the warring selves, that the individual ever reaches the road to peace in the self. This rare understanding of the problem gives Miller's work a less scolding rancorous quality than that of Lawrence; he is temperamentally a larger man and consequently less hard on himself and the world; he takes time off to develop his comic gifts; he devotes a great deal of his time to buffoonery which irritates the 'serious reader'. But his intentions are very strictly honourable in all that he does, while an essential childishness of spirit makes him rather enjoy being caught in awkward or ridiculous positions. In Lawrence's work the gradual curve towards self-reconciliation as man and artist was not completely carried out. His death cut him off at perhaps the most important stage in his career if we are to judge the temper of stories like *The Man Who Died* and poems like *The Ship of Death*, which breathe an entirely new air of calm and relaxation: as if every rancour and every disenchantment had suddenly given place to a new understanding of the artist's role. It is this core of self-realization which Miller has had time to examine and develop, and which forms the theme of his latest work and much that he promises us for the future; like Lawrence, however, he values art as a method of self-realization, not as an end in itself. ('I always say: Art For My Sake') barks Lawrence somewhere. Miller writes: 'Concerning every bold act one may raise the reproach of vulgarity. Everything dramatic is in the nature of an appeal, a frantic appeal for communion. Violence, whether in deed or speech, is an inverted sort of prayer . . . Initiation itself is a violent process of purification and union. Whatever demands radical treatment demands God, and always through some form of death or annihilation.'

Whenever the obscene crops out one can smell the imminent death of a form. Those who possess the highest clue are not impatient, even in the presence of death; the artist in words, however, is not of this order, he is only at the vestibule, as it were, of the palace of wisdom . . . When he fully understands his role as creator he substitutes his own being for the medium of words' . . .

The artist, then, is not for Miller the supreme figure of the age. He is only a stage towards a fuller self-realization—a self-realization which he can only reach by coming to terms with himself as a man.

I have avoided so far any reference to the obscenity of Miller's writings, because I was anxious to establish his *bona fides* as a serious practitioner of the arts in order to present, if possible, a fairly proportioned picture. For the average reader in England he is, of course, a 'banned writer', a little of whose work is available in bowdlerized collections. The problem which faces a critic of Miller is to give some idea of his comparative stature to a public which has so far only seen one hundredth part of his work. (How would one indicate the stature of Stendhal to a public which was only allowed to read, say, 'Armance' and 'La Vie De Henri Brulard'?) Miller's main line of development runs through *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, and *The Rosy Crucifixion* (the first volume of which, containing nearly a thousand pages of prose, is due to appear in Paris this spring). So far in England and the U.S.A. the public has had to remain content with a few collections of essays, short stories and excerpts—which give a more muddled impression of Miller's work than is really necessary. Much of the work in these collections is good, of course; but the best of it represents Miller's peripheral activities rather than his main task—which is a seven-volume autobiography. Inasmuch as his main task is only half-done, then, he is entitled to the suspended judgement of his critics—and of those who level against his work the charge of formlessness. The connecting line of development in Miller's work may not yet be clear—the line which is to link them into a single autobiographic whole. One thing is certain: he will not follow a line based upon times, events or characters. Organization of moods and ideas must be the key to his work. Yet already the span between *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* covers a tremendous revolution in ideas. The fleshly

struggle which rages in his first book, has been transferred to the metaphysical plane in his third; the battlefield is no longer the flesh but the spirit. Bergson and Spengler have given way to the Chinese and the Hindus, so to speak. Even his use of obscenity as a technique has radically altered.

It is difficult to deal with the question of obscenity in art partly because of the pusillanimity of the Anglo-Saxon reading public, and partly because of that queer deficit in personal experience which makes the Anglo-Saxon somehow emotionally stunted, however intellectually capable he may be. This quality makes him over-value obscenity. He cannot simply look it in the eye. He must be for or against it—and both points of view are wrong in the eyes of Miller. The truth is that one should not, in a civilized country, have to make a case for obscenity in literature at all, to treat it as Something Awfully Serious which can, however, be Intellectually Justified. The Anglo-Saxon would like someone, please, to Make A Case for the obscenity, so that he can enjoy it without feeling guilty. Lawrence supplied such a demand in *Lady Chatterly* by making out a romantic and puritanical case for obscenity; his public was able to agree that sex was really a Sacrament, and that his gamekeeper was somehow an Important Symbol. The moral justification simply had to be there. The distinction between *Tropic of Cancer* and *Lady Chatterly*, centres about this point—for Miller (who, unlike Lawrence, has thoroughly assimilated Freud) recognizes that sex is *both* a sacrament *and* also uproariously funny (not to mention silly, holy, and tiresome all in one); and that to tidy it into part of a moral scheme is simply to shackle the reader more and more firmly into his puritanism. He has mastered, in fact, the great discovery of the age—ambivalence in values—and that is what lifts most of his work above the ruck of ordinary writing.

‘The most insistent question put to the writer of obscene literature is: why did you have to use such language? The implication is, of course, that with conventional terms or means, the same effect might have been obtained. Nothing . . . could be farther from the truth . . . Effects are bound up with intentions and these in turn are governed by laws of compulsion as rigid as nature’s own. That is something which non-creative individuals seldom understand . . . There will always be a gulf between the creative artist and public because the latter is immune to the mystery

inherent in and surrounding all creation. Putting to one side all questions of ego and temperament, and taking the broadest view of the creative process, which makes of the artist nothing more than an instrument, we are nevertheless forced to conclude that the spirit of the age is the crucible in which, through one means or another, certain vital and mysterious forces seek expression . . . When obscenity crops out in art, in literature more particularly, it usually functions as a technical device; the element of the deliberate which is there has nothing to do with sexual excitation, as in pornography. If there is an ulterior motive it is one that goes far beyond sex. Its purpose is to waken, to usher in a sense of reality . . .

For those then, who are on the look-out for the moral justification behind this literary practice, these words should prove of interest. Miller would like morality to be, not simply a barren code of observance, of behaviour, but a genuine reflection of the human spirit. And in a paradoxical sort of way his attack on the proprieties is an attack upon prudery, and as such an invitation to reconsider morality, to revalue it. It is no use just acting good, he says, in effect, that is too easy. The problem is how to *be* good. The use of obscenity, then, has something like a religious function for Miller—and indeed his attitude to the four-letter words reminds one of the ‘unpronounceable word’ in the Jewish religion—the ‘mikvah’—which is at one and the same time the worst obscenity, and the holiest of holy words.

‘Once the artist has made use of his extraordinary powers, and I am thinking of the use of obscenity in just such magical terms, he is inevitably caught up in a stream of forces beyond him. He may have begun by assuming that he could awaken his readers, but in the end he himself passes into another dimension of reality wherein he no longer feels the need to force an awakening. His rebellion over the prevalent inertia about him becomes transmuted, as his vision increases, into an acceptance and understanding of an order and harmony which is beyond man’s conception and approachable only through faith . . . Ultimately, then, he stands among his own obscene objurgations, like the conqueror amidst the ruins of a devastated city . . . He knocked to awaken, but it was himself he awakened. And once awake he is no longer concerned with the world of sleep; he walks in the light, and, like a mirror, reflects his illumination in every act.’

The statement is a challenging one, and one which removes Miller at a distance from Lawrence—whose ambition was simply to restore some of the flowering warmth of happy and candid sexual relations to the stunted Anglo-Saxon public; yet both saw very clearly that the death of our world is bound up very tightly with the dying sexuality, the dying ego of Western man. 'Once the obscene is accepted,' writes Miller, 'whether as a figment of the imagination or as an integral part of human reality, it inspires no more dread or revulsion than could be ascribed to the flowering lotus which sends its roots down into the mud of the stream on which it is borne.'

'A well read man', writes Proust, 'will at once begin to yawn with boredom when anyone speaks to him of a new "good book", because he imagines a sort of composite of all the good books that he has read and knows already, whereas a good book is something special, something incalculable, and is not made up of the sum of all previous masterpieces but of something which the most thorough assimilation of every one of them would not enable him to discover . . .'

Alas! The proposition is all too true. The middle talent is not so difficult to assess. It is the outsize writer, the phenomenon, who is a difficult fish to hook! And in the case of Miller it is doubly difficult because he himself, splashing and floundering in the mystical menstrum of sensation and memory, does very little to help the critic or the public. Here and there he writes very badly; and being deficient in critical sense he often publishes pieces of work which are below his highest level simply in order to get them off his chest. Nearly everything written in dispraise of him is true—though unfortunately he has nearly always fallen upon critics with axes to grind. Mr. Orwell, for example, whose fluent and delightful prose has won him a deservedly wide public, has outlined a number of serious holes in the Miller chain-mail; he has a perfect right to the defects, but one must insist on a more balanced picture of Miller the artist. It is possible after all to have serious religious or moral intentions and not be a political man. And Miller's refusal to interest himself in the betterment of the world by planned economy and legislation may come from a perfectly serious conviction that the world cannot be improved that way; that it can best be improved by the self-improvement of the individual. It must be admitted, however, that Miller rather

enjoys giving a picture of himself which suggests something between a crook, a cowboy and a clown; it is really his own fault if the critic takes fright at the picture he presents of a ruthless, anti-social and unmoral desperado. This Faustian vein in Miller is, however, a source of considerable amusement to his friends who know him to be the most gentle, most considerate and honourable of men. Indeed his fundamental generosity and warm-heartedness make him appear very ill-equipped to play Mephistopheles; and while he is an enchanter, to be sure, his true pedigree stretches back through Prospero to Merlin. But the vein of irresponsible naïveté in his nature makes him easy enough game on occasion.

Some account of his life, and his writing in relation to it, deserves a place in this study.

He was born in New York City on 26 December 1891 of poor parents. He was transplanted to Brooklyn at the age of one, and spent his early life in the streets of this poor quarter of New York. He has re-created the scene magnificently in several places, but best of all in *Black Spring*:

‘To be born in the street means to wander all your life, to be free. It means accident and incident, drama, movement. It means, above all, *dream*. A harmony of irrelevant facts which gives your wanderings a metaphysical certitude. In the street you learn what human beings really are; otherwise, or afterwards, you invent them. What is not in the open street is false, derived, that is to say, *literature* . . .

‘In my dreams I come back to the 14th Ward as a paranoiac returns to his obsessions. When I think of those steel-grey battleships in the Navy Yard, I see them lying there in some astrologic dimension in which I am the gunnersmith, the chemist, the dealer in high explosives, the undertaker, the coroner, the cuckold, the sadist, the lawyer and contender, the scholar, the restless one, the jolt-head and the brazen-faced.

‘Where others remember of their youth a beautiful garden, a fond mother, a sojourn at the seashore, I remember, with a vividness as if it were etched in acid, the grim soot-covered walls and chimneys of the tin-factory opposite us, and the bright circular pieces of tin that were strewn in the street, some bright and gleaming, others rusted, dull, copperish, leaving a stain on the fingers; I remember the iron-works where the red furnace glowed

and men walked towards the glowing pit with huge shovels in their hands, while outside were the shallow wooden forms like coffins with rods through them on which you scraped your shins or broke your neck. I remember the black hands of the iron-moulders, the grit that had sunk so deep in the skin that nothing could remove it—not soap nor elbow grease nor money nor love nor death. Like a black mark on them! Walking into the furnace like devils with black hands—and later, with flowers over them, cool and rigid in their Sunday suits, not even the rains can wash away the grit. All these beautiful gorillas going up to God with swollen muscles and lumbago and black hands . . .

‘One passes imperceptibly from one scene, one age, one life to another. Suddenly, walking down a street, be it real or be it a dream, one realizes for the first time that the years have flown, that all this has passed forever and will live on only in memory; and then the memory turns inward with a strange clutching brilliance and one goes over these scenes and incidents perpetually, in dream and reverie, while walking a street, while lying with a woman, while reading a book, while talking to a stranger . . . Henceforward we walk split into a myriad fragments, like an insect with a hundred feet, a centipede with soft-stirring feet that drinks in the atmosphere; we walk with sensitive filaments that drink avidly of past and future, and all things melt into music and sorrow; we walk against a united world asserting our dividedness. All things, as we walk, splitting with us into a myriad iridescent fragments. The great fragmentation of maturity. The great change. In youth we were whole and the terror and pain of the world penetrated us through and through . . . And then comes a time when suddenly all seems to be reversed. We live in the mind, in ideas, in fragments. We no longer drink in the wild outer music of the streets—we *remember* only. Like a monomaniac we relive the drama of our youth. Like a spider that picks up the thread over and over and spews it out according to some obsessive logarithmic pattern . . . If we are stirred by the reflection on a wet pavement it is because at the age of seven we were suddenly speared by a premonition of the life to come as we stared unthinkingly into that bright liquid mirror of the street. If the sight of swinging door intrigues us it is the memory of a summer’s evening when all the doors were swinging softly and where the light bent down to caress the shadow there were golden calves

and lace and glittering parasols and through the chinks in the swinging door, like fine sand sifting through a bed of rubies, there drifted the music and the incense of gorgeous unknown bodies. Perhaps when the doors parted to give us a choking glimpse of the world, perhaps then we had the first intimation of the impact of sin, the first intimation that here over little round tables, spinning in the light, our feet idly scraping the sawdust, our hands touching the cold stem of a glass, that here over these little round tables which later we are to look at with such yearning and reverence, that here, I say, we are to feel in the years to come the first iron of love, the first stains of rust, the first black, clawing hands of the pit . . . ' Extensive quotation is the only way to trying to indicate the sweep and volume of Miller's prose, the powerful swell and cadence of its music. Its rough masculinity is very far removed from 'toughness' in the Hemingway sense; it has a rampaging Elizabethan quality, a rare tonic vitality which comes from the savage health of its creator. Taken in bulk, with all its prodigious tracts of roughage, its plateaux covered in uncut gems, its weird tracts of half-explored vegetation running along the snow-lines of metaphysics—one is reminded of the stutterings and stammering of a Whitman or a Melville. Like them, Miller belongs in the direct line of American genius—a genius which is essentially formless. They are portmanteau writers, discursive, rambling and prolix: vulnerable only because they do not bother to hide the fact that they are still growing. They may be tiresome but they are never bleak; and in Miller's case at any rate almost everything he writes is rewarding, even the nonsense and the light comedy. Writers of this *genre* have a very poor literary sense. They seem to need an impresario, a resident critic to plead with them against the publication of inferior work; they need, in a sense, to be saved from their own volcanic gifts. They lack the gifts of mendacity, temperance and cunning which alone can shape a literary career. They have, however, more important things to do with their time than to spend it worrying about a 'literary career'. This at any rate is true of Miller, who began *Tropic of Cancer* after a long period of actual starvation in Paris, knowing perfectly well that no publisher in the world would print it . . .

The road from the Brooklyn Bridge to the Pont Neuf, was a long and bitter one, packed with human experiences and a great deal of suffering. His early manhood, with its anxieties, revolts

and despairs, has already been marvellously described in *Black Spring* and in *Tropic of Capricorn*. It is saturated in the sweat and violence of the open street. 'There are huge blocks of my life', he writes, 'which are gone forever. Huge blocks gone, scattered, wasted in talk, action, reminiscence, dream. There never was any time when I was living *one* life, the life of a husband, a lover, a friend. Whatever I was, whatever I was engaged in, I was leading multiple lives.' And this sense of multiple meaning is admirably conveyed by his writing which follows ideas and memories down long labyrinths of images, long *couloirs*, of darkness, corridors full of shattered prisms. Miller's world is a world seen through a prism. It glitters indeed with a wild prismatic beauty. It is not a world described, contained, *edited* as the world of Proust or Joyce is: his method is the method of poetic documentary—the lens traversing the whole field from left to right, picking out dissimilar objects of scrutiny and marrying them up to the image which contains them both. Between story, poem and essay there is no dividing line. Sometimes the author uses them as separate media, sometimes he jumbles them up together. And sometimes, it must be admitted, he falls asleep in the centre of his own canvas . . . out of the sheer spirit of mischief. Miller would have made a splendid Lord of Misrule. 'I can think of no lovelier day than this in the full bloom of the xxth century, with the sun rotting away and a man on a little sledge blowing the *Song of Love* through his piccolo. This day shines in my heart with such a ghastly brilliance that even if I were the saddest man in the world I should not want to leave the earth . . . Imagine having nothing on your hands but your destiny. You sit on the doorstep of your mother's womb and you kill time—or time kills you. You sit there chanting the doxology of things beyond your grasp. Outside. Forever Outside.'

Tropic of Cancer was begun in Paris in 1931 while the author was tramping the streets all day and sleeping wherever possible during the night—sometimes in the open. It was not published until 1934. It is difficult to describe the merits of this book simply because it is the expression of an entirely new personality in literature. While it is lacking entirely in the imposed form or proportions that one has been taught to expect in novels, the whole canvas is held together simply by the appetite and force of the personality behind the prose. This is how it begins:

'I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced. We are all alone here and we are dead.

'Last night Boris discovered he was lousy. I had to shave his arm-pits and even then the itching did not stop. How can one get lousy in a beautiful place like this? But no matter. We might never have known each other so intimately, Boris and I, had it not been for the lice.

'Boris has given me a summary of his views. He is a weather prophet. The weather will continue bad, he says. There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of a change anywhere. The cancer of time is eating us away. Our heroes have killed themselves or are killing themselves. The hero, then, is not Time but Timelessness. We must get in step, a lock-step, towards the prison of death. There is no escape. The weather will not change.

'It is now the fall of my second year in Paris. I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom.

'I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive. A year ago, six months ago, I thought I was an artist. I no longer think about it. *I am*. Everything that was literature has fallen from me. There are no more books to be written, thank God. This then? This is not a book. This is a libel, slander, defamation of character. This is not a book in the ordinary sense of the word . . .'

Reveries, ideas, short stories, flights of images: the book contains them all. Yet its wholeness as a work of art is quite independent of the form. The triumph is one of an individuality which, by its sheer force, has tapped the well-springs of creative prose and turned them to its own uses. The tide of lyrical emotion carries one onwards through the savagery, the obscenity, the raw humour and the marvellous descriptive poetry of the book.

'Twilight hour. Indian blue, water of glass, trees glistening and liquescent. The rails fall away into the canal at Jaurés. The long caterpillar with lacquered sides dips like a roller-coaster. It is not Paris. It is not Coney Island. It is a crépuscular mélange of all the cities of Europe and Central America. The railroad yards below me, the tracks black, webby, not ordered by engineers but cataclysmic in design like those gaunt fissures in the polar ice which the camera registers in degrees of black.'

Tropic of Cancer might be called a description of Paris life from the viewpoint of a literary *clochard*; yet this is not all, for though Paris is reflected marvellously in these pages, the book is also a sort of swan-song for city man—a swan-song which is to end in a death-rattle! 'The wallpaper with which the men of science have covered the world of reality is falling to tatters. The grand whore-house they have made of life requires no decoration; it is essential only that the drains function adequately. Beauty, that feline beauty which has us by the balls in America, is finished. To fathom the new reality it is first necessary to dismantle the drains, to lay open the gangrened ducts which compose the genito-urinary system that supplies the excreta of art . . . The age demands violence but we are getting only abortive explosions . . .'

The justification for the violence, for the obscenity, lies in the fact that such writing is fecundating; it bursts the barriers of all self-confession. Yet at every point it was healthy, vital, alive.

The publication of this book earned Miller a few admirers and the good opinion of several discerning and influential critics; it reached a second edition in its first year. After so many years of frustration, of working at jobs which he hated (the list is incredible and includes everything between a grave-digger and a concert pianist) he at last felt he had found his own voice. To be sure, it was not his first. He had begun his writing career in earnest in 1925 and had completed two long and unremarkable novels—novels which show no trace of his subsequent talents. He had also, like Whitman before him, peddled poems from door to door in the poorer quarters of New York. All this was behind him, and the publication of *Tropic of Cancer* marked a real turning point in his career.

Black Spring and *Tropic of Capricorn* were soon to follow, but their production was sporadically interrupted by other literary activities. An enormous volume on the world of D. H. Lawrence, which had been gathering chapters like a snowball over the previous decade, began to assume its final form. I do not know whether it was ever actually completed. Like all Miller's books it was, when I last saw it, in its thousand-page state, waiting to be pruned. *Tropic of Cancer* itself was distilled out of a colossal MS. which I was lucky enough to read, and which could not have been less than fifteen hundred pages long. It seemed to me that there was enough material to make three or four *Tropic of Cancers* from

it. The same sort of prolixity was evident in the books to follow. Miller's production has always been a phenomenon to his friends—not to mention the speed at which he writes. Among the other activities of this joyous period was *The Hamlet Letters*—another book which is exasperatingly good in some parts, exasperatingly bad in others; while the editing of a small magazine in Paris kept Miller too busy for a major effort, but not busy enough to interrupt a steady flow of long critical essays, pen-portraits of intimate friends he admired, and short stories.

Public interest in his work was, and still is, sluggish, but the feeling that responsible critics in several countries admired his writing, and that at last reputable literary journals were open to him and eager to print it, acted as a tonic.

Tropic of Capricorn appeared in February 1939, and with its appearance Miller decided to take a holiday away from France. The curious reader will find an account of his Greek holiday in *The Colossus of Maroussi*, published in England. Early in 1940 he sailed for America where a further period of vicissitude and poverty awaited him—a period which ended some time in 1944 with his third marriage, and his establishment in a little house of his own situated in the Big Sur region of California. At the time of writing he is addressing himself to the fifth volume of his autobiography. I have already stressed his refusal to create a mould of form in which to cast his work—as Joyce did by borrowing a form from Homer, as Proust did by repetition and restatement and regrouping. Miller's work has no 'characters', there are only savage charcoal cartoons of human beings: it has no time-springing—it is written in a perpetual historic present: it has no sequence, location, process . . . Its triumphs are the triumphs of all documents of the heart, and the appeal it makes to those of us who recognize his greatness, is the appeal of what is living, flowering, and indulging a boundless appetite for life. A friendly critic writes: 'Miller demands rather a special recipe. Take Rousseau. Let him be psycho-analysed by Freud. Add Sennett's *Esoteric Buddhism* to Spengler. Mix this with a prose-gift as large as Lawrence and serve in Paris. I think him a bold mystic to mix piety and sensuality—the two hungers—so well. And to show us how to be happy men as well.'

There is much that is below his highest standard, to be sure, much that is careless, ill-judged, rash, splenetic, shapeless,

over-stated . . . These defects are the peculiar defects of his particular type of genius. But they should not blind us to his positive qualities. Judged by his best work he is already among the greatest contemporary writers. The completion of his seven-volume autobiography, if it fulfils the promise of what he has already given us, will put his name amongst the three or four great figures of the age. It only remains for me to add that this is a considered opinion.

BRIAN HOWARD

THE DUST

No soap can wash away this sundust
And no scrubbing, this salt dust of the sea.
What is this powder with which you are covered
When the sun lies on your skin, slantingly?

Something like pollen, yet finer, lighter
And more of a mineral thing. It glows
A St. Elmo's fire, a quicksilver wire
Which grows with the sun and with the sun goes.

Is it the true state of being clean? It smells
Like an approaching island, or a shipload of hay.
Made of seadust, sunsalt and flesh, is it the true sign
Of being well and whole? It cannot be washed away.

All I know is, this thing is not a substance
Found on the ill or ugly, or on those
Whose favourite word is 'No'. It is very often
Worn by the beautiful instead of clothes.

All I know is, the desperate have washed you
Using their holy water, for two thousand years
And still the dust I speak of burns upon you
As bright as Love. Brighter than all their tears.

ANON

LETTER FROM AN EX-CONSCRIPT

DURING his first few days in the army, the conscript of today is shown a film entitled *Call-up*, which it is worth while to describe at some length as the example of how the modern National Serviceman is supposed to react and develop during his stretch. The film starts by showing four or five boys receiving their call-up papers, their different classes, characters and reactions being such that each conscript can see part of himself in at least one of them. Then comes their arrival at the camp, their introduction to the sergeant ('... did I hear someone say he was being made a charwoman? Well, you are! so GET ON WITH IT') and to the officer ('I know it all seems a bit strange at first, but you'll soon settle down: and if any of you has any worries, don't hesitate to come and ask me'). There is a flash of their first meal, their first drill parade, quarrels in the barrack-room. Obscene language, in fact, is all that is lacking to make this an exact portrayal of what the audience has undergone during the previous day or two. The film continues to portray the men settling down, learning to do and to like their new job. Their platoon is shown being 'welded into a team' as the army puts it. Like all good propaganda, this film is not a lie, only a perversion of the truth. The average conscript does get accustomed, or at any rate resigned, to his new life; threats of doubling round the square holding a bren gun above his head do induce him to learn something about that weapon's mechanism; in short, he adapts himself. Also, the army's boast that a platoon develops *esprit de corps* is justified, for so does any body of men who live and work together for any length of time. The British Army did not invent comradeship, nor does it provide an especially good environment for it.

Barrack-room thieving, for instance, an old army custom, does not make for mutual trust. It is certainly not mentioned in *Call-up*, but no description of army life is complete without it. It is not confined to those, only an insignificant minority, who stole while civilians. Most soldiers are deficient of some army kit, through

wear, neglect, or theft. When kit is checked, the conscript cannot afford to pay for his losses, so he steals from someone else. Any compunction is stifled by the fact that his own kit was probably stolen, and the consideration that the victim can always do the same. For months and years a deficiency will thus pass from one man to another like an alpha particle in vapour, leaving a trail of moral wreckage.

More fundamental to the soldier's attitude than thieving, however, because more widespread, is what he calls 'skiving'. This word, which every ex-Serviceman will remember, means exactly the same as the civilian 'shirking', but is used here because 'to shirk' tends to have a pejorative connotation, whereas 'to skive' has, if anything, rather the opposite. Any reason for missing a parade or unpleasant duty is a 'good skive'. The expression 'dirty skiver' is found, but is usually prompted by envy; 'old skiver', as a term of endearment, is anyway much more common. Malingering is a common method of skiving: in many camps they try to minimize this by making it as unpleasant as possible to report sick. At one Scotch camp as high a standard of turn-out and drill is required for sick parade as for guard. Those who are very lame are sometimes excused the march to the medical inspection room, but marching smartly, swinging the arm to shoulder height, and especially stamping the feet, probably causes patients with headaches and temperatures considerable discomfort. Religion is another way by which skiving is sometimes made possible. At Mons O.C.T.U. the cadets are probably the most devout in the army. There is a daily Communion service which occurs during muster parade, and excuses those who attend it the daily inspection. The chief reasons for skiving are as follows. First, many military duties seem not only unpleasant, but fatuous. Then, the army pays for a twenty-four hour day at about twopence an hour. This means in theory that the soldier is always on duty, in practise that he is paid as much when idle as when working.

Thieving and skiving are probably the two most striking features in the general demoralization undergone by the soldier. This demoralization is hardly palliated by the sight of the freemasonry between officers and N.C.O.s. In the writer's experience, a drunken officer, found climbing in at the window of the orderly sergeant's bunk, was helped to bed by the latter: a week or so previously a private, drunk and disorderly, had

been awarded twenty-one days' detention. Less striking examples are daily evident to the observant conscript, and tend to make him rather cynical. From all this the conclusion appears to be inescapable, that army life has a damaging effect on the qualities of citizenship. This would appear to be borne out by the crime waves which occurred after both world wars, and the 'jemenfoutisme' of the modern French, who have always practised conscription.

One of the favourite remarks by N.C.O.s is, 'You don't think in the army'. The soldier is not treated as a responsible person, and therefore does not behave like one. Citizenship consists largely in willing obedience to convention and authority: degrading conventions and boneheaded authority do not foster it.

Different conscripts react differently to their surroundings. Probably the majority, when they have overcome the initial strangeness and homesickness, are not uniformly miserable. They do not mind the relinquishment of their individuality, and perhaps even welcome it as eliminating responsibility. They represent the kind of person who takes his holidays at Butlin's. It is the more intelligent conscripts who are really to be pitied. Many readers will remember a book called *Vice Versa*, in which an elderly gentleman changes positions with his son, and goes to school, in the shape of a boy of thirteen. They will recall his feelings of outraged adulthood when treated as such by the masters. The feelings of the intelligent conscript are of the same nature. He has attained adult status, perhaps taken a civilian job, perhaps been to a university. From the moment he joins the army he loses this status, and is a member of a herd, with no more right to be an individual than a preparatory schoolboy. He can never be alone, never get away from the tuneless songs and imbecile jokes of the barrack-room. He is always treated as a potential criminal, and if he comes on parade with a dirty cap badge he is treated as an actual criminal. The N.C.O.s regard him with dislike, for they suspect him of thinking himself superior, or, worse, of being superior to themselves. Many will recall their sensations, as schoolboys, when told by some greying school hero of twenty-five years before, that school should provide the happiest time of their life. The cool insolence of those who say that the army is a good education, because 'you meet all sorts', induces feelings of the same kind in the intelligent National Serviceman. This kind of misconception is

so common that it deserves a certain amount of attention. A day in the army is spent as follows. In the morning, barrack-room chores, followed by the morning inspection, followed by periods of drill, weapon training and physical training. In the afternoon, weapon training, physical training, drill. The only free time is in the evening, and that has to be partly used for cleaning the uniform and equipment for the next day.

Some periods, it is true, perhaps as many as three a week, are devoted to 'education'. These usually take the form of a quiz or spelling-bee, as they are easy for the education sergeants to prepare. These sergeants can hardly be blamed for taking little interest: they are young, often National Servicemen, and they are suspected of being literate; they are therefore snubbed and disregarded in the sergeants' mess, and if the sergeant-major needs some men to dig a flower bed or carry some coke, it is always, if possible, the education period that is so occupied. The education sergeant is of course not told, and frequent repetition of this discourages the careful preparation of interesting periods.

Education, then, as such, can hardly be said to exist in the army. The notion that the 'meeting of all sorts' compensates for this the young man who is used to a university or a school curriculum is absurd. There are two ways in which a man can learn from his fellows: through being taught by them, or through observing them. Few of the 'all sorts' can teach the intelligent conscript much, and those that can are those whom he would anyway have met at the university; it is not possible to learn much about other classes and regions from men who have been transplanted into an army barrack-room. In the army, a man quickly takes on the habits, language, and outlook of the soldier, so little can be learned about his own. Ability to imitate the Lancashire dialect or a knowledge of 'Eskimo Nell' comprises about all that can be learnt about other ways of life in the average barrack-room. It is hardly surprising that the National Serviceman bears a grudge against the authorities for conscription. He feels that his generation is being exploited by the middle aged in order to defend their freedom, comfort, and security, and to put off the deluge until they are safely dead; for he feels that the present measures can only delay it. He therefore considers that he will get the worst of both worlds.

Conscription is probably necessary for national security. Service

officers are unanimous in saying so, but as its abolition would entail loss of their war substantive rank, it is possible that there is an element of axe-grinding in this. In any case, it should not be continued longer than is absolutely necessary, as it tends to turn the stupid into unemployables and the intelligent into neurotics or revolutionaries.

SELECTED NOTICES

News from South America. By G. S. Fraser. Harvill Press, London, May 1949. 10s. 6d.

This is a somewhat rapid travel book of several virtues; its observant author is informative, descriptive, conscientious, thoughtful, philosophical, and, at times, metaphysical (mainly on the score of poetry). He sets out to examine the many differences between the character of South Americans and of Europeans. Can these be explained? The cases that he makes out for his theories and arguments are stimulating, illuminating, controversial. I imagine that, not knowing South America, one would be greatly encouraged to go there after reading this book. Knowing it (a little of the Argentine and much more of Chile, two of the four countries he deals with) I am further impelled to hope I may indeed return there one day.

The going came about in an enchanting way. It was a spontaneous offer from fate, in the guise of a young man, Jorge Elliot, met casually in London, about to return to Chile during the course of his work for the Hudson Institute. Sir Eugen Millington Drake, our one-time Minister in Montevideo, is the esteemed founder of this Institute of Cultural Relations between Great Britain and the River Plate Republics. Would not Fraser join the group of students shortly leaving for these countries? Spontaneously too, he said yes. He was there just under three months; but he is wrong, as well as modest, when he says that maybe this was too short a time for a proper account to be made, an analysis attempted. He saw and met, and came and went, and noted much, and has written it all very ably; and, moreover, in his Preliminaries (and indeed, throughout) he gives a good synthesis of the socio-political scene, recent and present, in the Argentine, Uruguay and Chile. He tells us about past leaders and tyrants, and about the ideology of several of the leading men of letters of today. His conciseness in this large field is remarkable, one admires his professional craftsmanship. He was interested, interested all the way, and has repaid fate by being interesting.

Brazil was the kindly arrival at polite customs, and much Americanization in Rio and Sao Paolo—and beauty, that of an endless repetition of the identical, a beauty from which a certain traditional tension has been removed . . . It was the famous Brazilian, Portinari, and his murals, and students and educational matters, and thoughts about the strange story of Paraguay's fight against the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentine and Uruguay last century. Uruguay (with an English flavour of twenty years ago) was the traditional meat-roasting in

the open, and more students, and sights, and Victoria Ocampo of the Argentine, famous foundress and editress of the important *Sur* review, lecturing on Richard Hillary at the British Institute in Montevideo, and the Uruguayan sculptor San Martín, the painter Torres García, inspired by pre-Colombian geometrical form, and the artist Figari.

In the Argentine, the group was half dead from tremendously lavish hospitality and seldom seems to have slept, though Fraser's delightful vignettes of meat-packing, shoe-factory, public and private encounters, receptions, discussions with the intelligentsia, etc., seem to have won the battle against the result of constant overfeeding and 'being kept up nights'. How neat a characterization of Dr. Ricardo Rojas, doyen of Argentine letters and historian: 'He is that sort of universal nationalist for whom every nation has its own specific contribution to make to the history of mankind'. Dr. Rojas, one of the most famous intellectual leaders of South America, told Fraser what should be kept in mind, I think, above so much else today when this old, tried country of ours could be a great force of balance and of equity between the raucous West and the developing might of the East. He said of the destiny of Great Britain:

'What one would have wished him to say and one wondered wistfully if it were true. Great Britain, no longer the great power she had been, either in a military or a material sense, was still a great moral power in the world. Attempting, as she now was, to combine liberty and order, tradition and progress, a sense of individual enterprise and a feeling for social duty, in a living pattern, she had the destiny of setting for other nations the example of the golden mean. Her people were not fanatics, they were not aggressive, and yet they had a strong and serious sense of purpose and a sturdy readiness to defend their principles.'

And in Jorge Luis Borges, described by some as 'most original and interesting of living South American writers', Fraser met a poet of emotions 'coiled and compressed', and he is interesting in his comments about him.

We move between past and present with our author in his notes and thoughts and reflections on national leaders of last century: General San Martín, liberator of the Argentine and Chile from Spanish domination, and the mysterious and romantic figures in the churning crucible of a hundred years ago: Dr. Francia, dictator of Paraguay, Quiroga, Rosas. Interesting is Fraser on General Perón, the dictator of certain advanced, constructive views and achievements—such as the betterment of workers' wages and conditions—but with a vigorous dislike of much modern painting and emitting the trenchant remark that in the Argentine 'as in all countries where little is done, much is written'. Beautiful descriptions of scenery, of the approach to the Andes, of 'learned and ever temperate Córdoba' and the azure region near it. The whole colour of travel is punctuated with vivid moments along General San Martín's army-route across the Andean Cordillera. After the immense pampas comes Mendoza where the mountains rise, with its winged monument to San Martín which evoked these words from an old English resident: 'The Condor flies high, but Liberty flies higher yet'.

The author is best of all on Chile. His heart warmed spontaneously to that gaunt, crazy, inspired, poetical land of wine and ultra-human values. Here he was much with Pablo Neruda (his guest, in fact), best and most virile and active

of Latin-American poets, long-tempered in his knowledge of the world, ardent, able pro-Republican during the Spanish war while Chilean Consul in Madrid. The antithesis of Borges,

'Neruda was the man of emotion; Borges, of intellect. Neruda was like a natural force working out from a centre; Borges . . . trying to contain and control natural forces in himself and in others.'

Much, and often, Neruda and Fraser discussed poetry—its mission in life, and so on. Knowing Neruda very well, I subscribe to one of Fraser's several descriptions of him:

'Neruda would claim that the strangeness of his own poetry does not spring from any attempt to surpass nature, but from a deep and reverent understanding and acceptance of nature . . . creative . . . destructive . . . with her patient monotony of theme and her endless variety of detail. He began as a poet of nature, and if he is now a poet of man, it is of man as a magnificent natural phenomenon; and in this he is typical of a continent in which the natural background dwarfs the human scene.'

Neruda, at that time a Senator and deeply concerned with the miners' strike, has long ago taken sides. He is what the French call *un poète engagé*, an anti-Fascist of very single heart, far from the wavering airs that blow around the world's ivory towers. I do not think that Fraser *understands* Neruda (from the many conflicting queries that he addresses himself about this great poet). That he *appreciated* him, high unto tears, is transcendently clear.

'Profound innocence, gay and sad, which I found also in Pablo's poems and in his personality. . . . Perhaps I should be glad that he is being given a chance to risk his life bravely for something he has committed himself to.'

(Later, Neruda was outlawed from the Senate on account of his stand for the miners and for his outspoken, fearless denunciation of Chile's present policy. For many months he was in hiding, his life often in danger, until able to get to Europe, where he now is.)

'No doubt,' writes Fraser, 'that fierce innocence is dangerous to the world but is not the mean prudence that hunts it down, that drives it into hiding, that kills it in the end, is not that dangerous too?'

*Not to have fire is to be a skin that shivers.
The complete fire is death. From partial fires
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.'*

Beautiful lines. But *is* the complete fire death? That is where I do not agree with the author, nor on the score of Neruda's 'innocence'. The French word *candeur* (in the sense of 'purity') would be closer. Taking sides, surely, in a man of such worth, means that he has seen enough evil to know his own mind as to where lies 'good', i.e. the opposition to evil. Neruda was a close friend of Federico Garcia Lorca; he saw, and opposed, the Spanish Fascists at work. Fraser was not in Spain during the war there. I do not think he would use the word 'innocence' about Neruda if he had been. But all this is another world, and the deep feeling that Neruda and certain other Chileans evoked make these pages on Chile the best in the book. Of his poetry, Neruda said that it had been 'too universal':

"Too universal?" I echoed in astonishment, remembering what Borges had said to me in Buenos Aires—that he was tired of local colour, tired even of mere human sentiment, that he wanted to give poetry a universality like that of philosophy, while Neruda now wished to embody in his verse the dense, refractory material of local geography and history.'

I think I know how this has come about. Pablo was first a somewhat abstract and always superbly worded poet of the universe ('Residencia en la Tierra'). Then the material impact of human life and death hit him one hundred per cent in the Spanish war ('España en el Corazon') and during the rising tide of Fascism. And lastly, the miners, their lives, their struggle, their persecuted condition. (Why, the poverty of Chile is such that it is positively Hogarthian. We have not such things in England today.) How much could be said about all this—the poet's change—were there but room here for more than a final note:

'Alas, he writes in the prelude to that great and terrible poem of his, "Las Furias y las Penas", alas, if with only one drop of poetry or of love we could placate the rage of the world, but that rage can be placated only by the struggle and the stout heart. The world has changed, and my poetry has changed. One drop of blood, fallen among these verses [a poem just before the Spanish war] will remain alive upon them, indelible like love.'

Soon, too soon, Fraser had to return to England. On the same ship was Ghioldi, secretary of the Argentine Communist Party, and a brilliant description he gives of him. He returned with thoughts about typical Latin-American man: the European

'fails to find him; there is as yet no typical man, as yet no typical philosophy. There is nothing typical. There is the wonderful, rich, confused background, which men are busily transforming . . . energetic, contradictory, individual responses to that background. . . . The Latin-American man, who will give a structural coherence to all that brilliant detail has still to be born.'

Is Europe, then, coherent? Europe! My speculations on this point should not suggest that—having accomplished what it set out to do—this is not a highly successful book.

NANCY CUNARD

Lucrezia Borgia. By Ferdinand Gregorovius. Phaidon Press. 10s. 6d.

Che ti dirò della seconda nuora
Succeditrice prossima di questa
Lucrezia Borgia, di ex cui d'ora in ora
La beltà, la virtù, la fama onesta,
E la fortuna crescerà non meno,
Che giovin pianta in morbido terreno?

ARIOSTO.

Orlando 13.49.

One of the greatest achievements of objective thinking by the Italians of the *quattrocento* and *cinquecento*, was the recognition of the fictitious character of the disinterested act. This brought along with it the necessary and supplementary

assessment of all men according to the realization of their plans and designs. 'Nothing', you say, 'succeeds like success', and belatedly echo a fifteenth-century Milanese proverb, 'Il più gran successo é successo'. Yet, even now, Macchiavelli is still misunderstood in the trans-alpine chill of the Protestant world, and the pursuit of fame and power and honour has been confused and reduced to the meagre dimensions of a complex in an artificial and unexperienced psychology. In a sophisticate society it is most clearly appreciated that greatness is never thrust upon unwilling shoulders, morality being but the means by which men justify before their fellows a choice among the many self-interested courses possible to them.

It is, therefore, and also, therefore, is not surprising that the name of Borgia should occasion, on the wrong side of the Alps, a dread, hardly-to-be-uttered opprobrium, in the very self-righteousness of which pose can be seen the signs, now hastily and now scratchily obscured, of a contradictory and alarming fascination. It is to be expected, I suppose, that a smug Puritan culture, no longer naïve yet still rude, should possess ambivalent tensions, while it is known that prudery is the most deep-seated of the sexual aberrations. But who is prepared for the depths of viciousness and perversion revealed during those few moments of quasi-instinctive reaction to the quiet and tinkling syllables: Borgia? It was, then, noteworthy of Ferdinand Gregorovius, even though motivated by that *folie de Méditerranée* to which German philosophers and poets seem so wholly prone, to undertake a revaluation of the Borgia. He is, of course, nearer to Nietzsche than to Burckhardt, with both of whom he has been compared. His approach, somehow, lacks the classic amplitude which humanized and unified Burckhardt's skilful manipulation of fragments and particulars. He shares with Nietzsche a schizoid and dividing method, and so, as the latter severed Dionysus from Apollo, Gregorovius heaps guilt upon Cesare and makes blameless the life of Lucrezia. Thus by means of a mechanism of projection he found external identities for the conflicting elements of his ambivalence. This said, recognizing the weakness of a second-generation-Romantic mental equipment, we may appraise the acumen of Gregorovius in his original exploitation of authentic, contemporaneous documents and in his initiation of modern critical study of the Borgia. From his book, at any rate, the view may be framed of the Borgia, not as exceptionable monsters, but as beings, magnificently and so passionately human, in whose lavish natures a rich mixture subsists from the extremes of vice and of virtue.

Neither the first, nor indeed the last, family to make a consistent practice of benefiting 'nephews', the Borgia through first, Callixtus, and then Alexander, raised nepotism to a guiding principle of papal policy and nearly succeeded in the translation of the papacy into a dynastic succession. Their greatness and their defeat reside in these activities, and it appears that the slightest of historical accidents prevented their being regarded as the benefactors of a very different Italy, a very different Europe. By this scale do the Italians measure the defeat of the Borgia; and it may be that, shaped by the absurd nexus of sentiments and politics which is the history of Italian secular relations with the Vatican, and coloured by the Spanish origins of this family, the bitterness of eight centuries of frustration has found for the Italians a scapegoat. Certainly, only during the latter half of the seventeenth century does the idea of the reprehensible

nature of the Borgia find general credence. True, some contemporaries of Alexander and of his children wrote angrily and in a hostile manner of them. But of these it is only necessary to indicate, for examples, that Sannazzaro wrote his verses for the Neapolitan court, the historian Guicciardini was a Florentine, and Priuli was a Venetian, to find sufficient ground for prejudice. Their political motives *pari passu* augment their bias.

Gregorovius has set out to clarify, as far as documents permit, the situation of Lucrezia Borgia, marshalling to this end the facts, the allegations and the panegyrics. Unfortunately, he has attempted to delineate her character and to judge her innocence according to some ethical standpoint, more or less corresponding to the Protestant conscience, remote in time and place from Lucrezia whom he has plucked out from the series of events in which she assisted. Somewhat lamely, does he say, we would gather, that this was just a dear, sweet girl, unfortunately under bad influence in her youth, but able, later in life, to develop her native sobriety and nobility, becoming a wise, good and prudent consort to the ruler of Ferrara. Gregorovius would have us believe her to be one of those plump, simpering and pinkish women to be seen in all the upholstered sentiment of Munich painting.

Lucrezia Borgia is to be admired or not as a child of her time, like Caterina Sforza or Vittoria Colonna, with both of whom she compares in unflinching singularity, but from whom she differs as they from each other. She was born in an age of great and admirable, great and execrable upstarts, but upstarts more brilliant and more endowed with intelligence and taste than any of the Black Aristocrats. There was scarcely a Sforza or a Malatesta who was not patron to more men of genius and high achievement than all the Colonna together, in spite of their boasted origins in the Rome of the Caesars. These upstarts, among whom we count the Borgia, were people of strange and enormous appetites, enriched and guided by their intellectual attainments to a refined, if monstrous, satisfaction. Above all they were ambitious. Typical may be cited Sigismondo Malatesta. There is no trace of evidence that Lucrezia Borgia was out of character, and though the testimony contains only relayed gossip this does not invalidate it and discount the allegations of Lucrezia's triple incest with father and two brothers. Nor can one imagine that, incestuous, she would, therefore, have not been sagacious and politically able. Nor, too, that she could not have had her honour, virtue and uprightness praised by Aldus Manutius, Ariosto, Bembo and the two Stozzi. It is not that these men would not have praised blatantly with tongue in cheek but that they did not see these qualities inconsistent with the sexual reputation of Lucrezia. After all, the guarded account, given by the Vatican master of ceremonies, Burchard, of a Bacchanale witnessed by Lucrezia in the company of her father and Cesare, describes the fifty participant whores as 'honestae'.

It is interesting, however, to observe that Lucrezia was apparently quite a desirable wife, and in view of the natures of the men of her time and class, it might be supposed her experience enabled her to win the love of a husband like Alfonso d'Este. Giovanni Sforza, it appears, was only troubled by her incest after his marriage to her had been annulled; and the most powerful persuasion had been required to force him to sign the document procuring this annulment. Alfonso di Biselli had to be murdered in order to free Lucrezia for

further service to her family's ambitions. Though political motives may have swayed her bridegrooms they eventually found her desirable above even political prudence. The more closely one examines her life, the more it becomes necessary to countenance all the scandalous accusations as not merely possible but as probable, to see her as a woman, like her father's last mistress, Giulia Farnese, who exploited her capability for sexual consumption in the interests and ambitions of her kinsmen. To this end, doubtless, was given her education, and the bawdy gossip of the Roman populace but underlines this when it charges her Cypriot tutor, Podocatharo, with her seduction *allo greco*. That she remained faithful to Alfonso d'Este, bearing him seven children, does not contradict such a conception of her, since her marriage to this duke was followed in a year or so by the death of her father, and the subsequent change in the fortunes of the Borgia demanded protection by this marriage to a strong ruling prince. It does not, of course, rule out the possibility that affection coincided with familial loyalty. The murder of Ercole Stozzi, as mysterious and inexplicable as that earlier of her brother, the Duke of Gandia, must be conceded as possibly modifying this last suggestion.

Part of the sub-title of Gregorovius's book reads '... a chapter from the morals of the Italian renaissance', but for the most part this author failed to understand the morals of those times, and the shocked indignation clinging to the first part of his sub-title 'The daughter of Pope Alexander VI', would indicate a reason for this failure. Bastardy, papal bastardy even, does not in itself differentiate our era from that of the Borgia. It is the easy and comparatively untroubled acceptance of natural along with the legitimate children that separates those times from ours. Then a man had his own singular talents with which to win a place in the world, and no throne, no office, no career, in all Italy, was impenetrably barred to him. Any position he could attain and continue to occupy was his by the right that no one had yet succeeded in replacing him. This is the standard by which Macchiavelli could admire Cesare Borgia who brought order and prosperity to the whole of Romagna and who, when a philosopher said to him 'Nell'atto é l'uomo', replied 'Nei molti atti é un sol uomo!'

As with Burckhardt's *Renaissance*, Mr. Goldscheider has again made an illuminating selection of paintings, buildings, documents and *materia varia* of the period which are reproduced in an appendix. Whether the original English translation is deficient or that Gregorovius has not received quite the careful attention of the Burckhardt, I do not know, but I would draw the editor's attention to an inconsistent and occasional appearance of 'j' now replaced in contemporary Italian orthography by 'i'. In one or two place-names a sort of macaronic spelling has been concocted out of the Latin and modern Italian versions. Furthermore, notes do not indicate, as one is led to expect, all the sources of contemporary opinions cited, notably those concerning Lucrezia by Matarazzo, Marcus Attilius Alexis, Petrus Martyr, Priuli, Macchiavelli and Guicciardini. These are, however, but minor editorial defects, easily remedied, and in no great way detract from this charming little book. More fundamental is the attempt to assess the book's value. It can never, I think, have the appeal of Burckhardt's *Renaissance*, and lacks, too, the authority. But if it cannot be cited as decisive in the direction historical criticism was to take, it remains still

the first of the profound and authentic studies of the Borgia, and of the daughter of that time, Lucrezia,

... Ch'ancor non nata onoro,

.....
Di singolor beltà, di gran prudenza,
E d'ogni altra lodevole eccellenza.

TONI DEL RENZIO

The Circus of Dr. Lao. By Charles G. Finney. Published by Grey Walls Press at 12s. 6d.

It cannot be long before the serious reader, with his essential equipment of 'a feeling for period', will begin to realize that there is something curious about Mr. Finney's book, will experience a Priestleyish sensation of having been here before. *The Circus of Dr. Lao* is a fantasy, and furthermore a fantasy which is clearly a commentary upon human hopes and limitations, fears and desires; yet the reader will search in vain for any pursuit motif, any mysterious and Kafkaesque 'they' or symbolic fortress to be challenged if only with Roland's slughorn. He will find no Antarctic explorers or Himalayan climbers skirting crevasses and cutting through the pack-ice of adolescent perils, no airmen shooting symbolic fathers, nor mothers enthroned upon the tops of mountains. There is, in fact, a total absence of Freud. This is not the expected and popular pantomime sponsored by Auden & Co., with its somewhat tired chorus of nursery nightmares, but a revival of an earlier and less-familiar spectacle, one which many younger spectators may fail to recognize at all. Here are the Medusa and the Chimaera, the Sea Serpent and the Roc, Apuleius's Golden Ass and Apollonius of Tyana; with epigrammatic wisdom they expose human folly, with romantic evocations they call forth wonder and desire as they unfold their fables and legends of distant times and places. The wisdom may smack occasionally of the pompous philosophizing of the club-room bore, may even degenerate into poll-parrot Polonius, the evocations may wander into dangerously purple patches or call forth desire with a blandishment that is embarrassingly close to a leer, but what a relief it is to be free from the corny numbers about personal guilt, the shop-soiled songs of sensitive childhood. We have left the Junior for the Senior Common Room. The mystery is solved only when we reach the very last words in the book—1929–34.

The Circus of Dr. Lao was, in fact, published in America in the middle thirties, it is not quite clear why it should have been chosen for publication in England in 1949, but we may be exceedingly grateful to Grey Walls Press for so unfashionable a choice. From the United States Catalogue it appears that Mr. Finney has published other works, it would be pleasant if the publishers could refresh a jaded book market with these also.

Mr. Finney comes of an honourable literary ancestry, and he gives us an important clue to his parentage in the course of his book. When Miss Agnes Birdsong, the high school English teacher, reads the advertisement for Dr. Lao's Circus, 'Two words in it bothered her: pornographic and hermaphroditic. She knew what pornography meant, having looked it up after reading a review of Mr. Cabell's Jorgen'. It is a nice tribute that the author pays here to his

master, whose impact upon the imaginations of his countrymen compares so exactly with that of Dr. Lao's circus upon the folk of Abalone, Arizona. Few authors did more to shock American prurience than James Branch Cabell, few can have contributed more to enrich the fantasy and wonderment of the few Americans who could respond, to aid the imaginative young against family Puritanism and Middle West Philistinism. Much of his work may now seem pretentious, and the subsequent debasement of fauns and nymphs by cinema cartoonists with their unpardonable whimsy and coy coarseness has made us aware of the potential dangers of the ironic use of myths. Jurgens, however, despite lapses of taste, remains a masterpiece. In the years 1900 to 1914 many English writers attempted to incorporate such elements into the body of English fiction. How dismal was their failure can be seen in the embarrassing Pans with their liberal middle-class paganism of the early Forster stories and of Hugh Walpole's *Maradick at Forty*. Cabell, in America, was no whit less donnish, but less ladylike, less fearful of a lapse of taste, and in the main he succeeded where they had failed. It is to Cabell, then, and ultimately therefore to Anatole France and *fin de siècle* paganism that Mr. Finney owes allegiance. If, however, his charm is less complete than Cabell's, his erudition altogether slighter, he has many gifts that his master lacks. His verbal wit is excellent, and what is perhaps more difficult in fantasy, he is complete master of the funny situation without any elements of facetiousness.

His theme is simple, and in this, I think, he is wise, for this type of fantasy should always be a matter of decoration rather than of development. A circus arrives by unknown means at Abalone, Arizona, towards the end of the depression. The advertisement inserted in the *Abalone Morning Tribune* makes it clear that this is no ordinary circus but one of 'honest-to-goodness freaks that had been born of hysterical brains rather than diseased wombs'. The story describes the impact of the circus with its genuine emanations from every mythology upon Abalone's population both collectively and individually. In bewilderment and boredom they parade before us from the moment of preliminary procession when mermaid, satyr, Sphinx and Golden Ass are all lightly dismissed or regarded as fakes, but when controversy rages furiously as to whether a caged exhibit is a bear, a Russian or a man, to the close of the afternoon's entertainment when, following a genuine Witches' Sabbath, the 'applause was sparse and unconvincing'.

In his ornate descriptions of the mythical creatures Mr. Finney frequently achieves a genuine lyricism, often by the happy device of presenting them through the mouths of the delightful Chinaman Dr. Lao, proprietor of the circus, and of the charming, vague, but mordant magician Apollonius of Tyana. These descriptive passages are on occasion a shade too lengthy, and the wisdom of Dr. Lao and Apollonius, like that of all the scholars and philosophers in Cabell and Anatole France, irritates as any too-prolonged session at High Table is bound to irritate, but far less than might be feared. Dr. Lao is a particularly successful creation, and through him is illustrated the degree to which—I paraphrase the blurb—the depth of understanding of Abalone's citizens is limited by the depth of their imagination, reaching heights of lyricism in his accounts of his beloved exhibits when the spectators respond and depths of pidgin English when faced by their ignorance or pomposity.

Thus his description of the hound of the hedges, 'surely this is the weirdest beast under the casual canopy of heaven', follows immediately on his retort to the spectators' repeated demands to see the bear 'Whatsa matter allee time talkee talk bear business? Me no savee bear business. You no like this Gloddam show, you go somewhere else.'

It is, however, in his characterization of the inhabitants of Abalone that Mr. Finney makes his most original contribution, for he succeeds in integrating into the framework of his fantasy a most remarkable collection of realistic portraits that might have come from the combined pages of Sinclair Lewis, Dos Passos and Hemingway. There is Miss Birdsong, the high school teacher who is found by Dr. Lao—but without any comment—in a curious situation with the satyr—'the boys all said she was damned good company after she learned to smoke and drink'. There is the stout and determined Kate who insists on staring at the Medusa with unfortunate results—'Hello there, Luther,' called a friend to her husband, 'what did you do, buy a statue at the circus?' 'That ain't no statue,' he said, 'that's Kate.' There is the pompous know-all—called 'the old-time party in golf pants'—who asks of the chimaera: 'What sort of lizard is incorporated in the monster's make-up, Dr. Lao? Would it be one of those Central American monitors, or iguanas as they are called?' 'Me no savee lizard talk', was the reply, though Dr. Lao later described the whole history of the chimaera from the days of Kublai Khan. There is the much-travelled soldier Larry who with his knowledge of Chinese gets a special view of the werewolf turning into a woman, only to register disgust on finding her to be three hundred years old—'An' I thought I was going to see a chicken!' As a whole, these characters make up one of the most complete indictments of small-town materialism I have encountered, an indictment launched with a full measure of sympathy and pathos that only serve to heighten its deadly accuracy. As an outstanding example of this satirical aspect of the book, I would refer the reader to the interview between Mrs. Howard T. Cassan, a middle-class widow and the magician Apollonius in which he reviews the full sterility of her existence: 'I thought you said you didn't evaluate lives,' snapped Mrs. Cassan. 'I'm not evaluating, I'm only wondering', is the reply.

At the end of the book is an appendix in the form of a biographical dictionary of the characters, a list of monsters mentioned and foodstuffs described, and a set of pertinent questions relating to the plot. It is, I imagine, a restatement of the narrative in the form of a parody on certain scientific analyses found at the end of some learned works. It is an entirely original feature and often very witty, but, on the whole, it seems too like a highbrow party game, and like all such games, lasts too long.

It should perhaps also be mentioned that *The Circus of Dr. Lao* is illustrated by what the publishers find it necessary to describe as 'serious studies in the art of the grotesque'. Personally, I found these illustrations of only mediocre assistance to my enjoyment of the book.

ANGUS WILSON

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